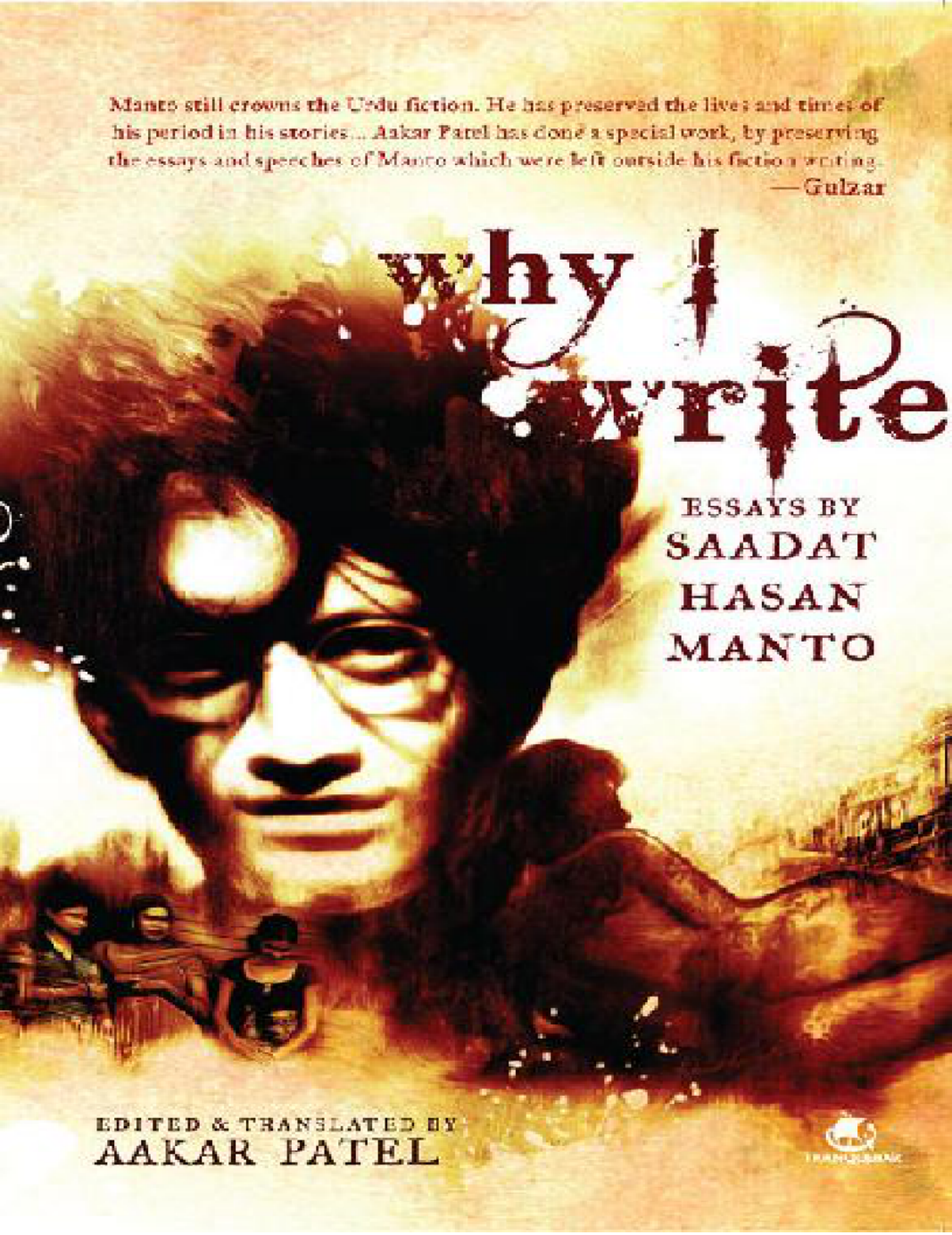
Manto still crowns the Urdu fiction. He has preserved the lives and times of his period in his stories... Aakar Patel has done a special work, by preserving the essays and speeches of Manto which were left outside his fiction writing.
—Gulzar

why I write

ESSAYS BY
SAADAT
HASAN
MANTO



EDITED & TRANSLATED BY
AAKAR PATEL

TRANQUEBAR

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Annotation

One of the greatest raconteurs of the 20th century, Saadat Hasan Manto declares that he was forced to write when his wife routinely demanded that he put bread on the table for the family. He doesn't attribute any genius to his skills as a writer and convinces his readers that the stories flowed even as he minded his daughters or tossed a salad. Equally, Manto treats his tryst with Bollywood with disdain and unmasks the cardboard lives of tinsel town when a horse is painted to double up for a zebra or multiple fans rotate to create a deluge. Two of Manto's favourite and recurring themes — Women and Partition — find special mention.

For the first time ever, this unique collection of non-fiction writing from the subcontinent's greatest writer, translated by well known author and journalist, Aakar Patel showcases Saadat Hasan Manto's brilliance while dealing with life's most mundane things — graveyards, bumming

cigarettes, a film crew with motley characters from mythology — and a sharp dissection of what ails the subcontinent even after 6 decades — Hindi or Urdu, vile politicians and the hopelessness of living under the shadow of fear.

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Saadat Hasan Manto

Why I Write: Essays

Introduction. Why Read Saadat Hasan Manto?

Saadat Hasan Manto was an Indian trapped in Pakistan. This was his misfortune, and it was ours too. His identity didn't come from religion and it came only partially from geography. It came mainly from his belonging to our culture, about which he wrote with great skill.

He reluctantly fled his beloved Bombay at Partition, complaining all the time against M A Jinnah's stupidity, but worried for the safety of his three little girls. His observations of Mahim and Bhendi Bazaar, while the city was at its most violent, have been reproduced in these pieces. We can no more blame him for going than we can our grandfathers for staying.

Manto was not particularly educated, and had dropped out of Aligarh Muslim University after being an indifferent student. From a migrant Kashmiri family, he lived in Amritsar in those days, and came to Bombay after his father's death to make a career as a journalist. Sleeping in the office of the paper he worked for, he got occasional work writing scripts for Bollywood (which wasn't known by that name then).

As a writer of films, he was not very good. Certainly he was not successful. There are no great hits to his name, and in fact the big-budget movie that he wrote on debut was, he tells us, a flop. However, his charisma attracted some of film industry's most powerful people, such as Ashok Kumar, to him. While only in his twenties when he was a junior writer, many of them attended his wedding in Mahim. Legends connected to the industry, such as the journalist Baburao Patel, were fond of Manto and helped him along in his career possibly because they suspected he had a hidden talent.

This talent was for producing his magical short stories. It made him the Maupassant of India. The liberal environment of British Bombay and its mixing of many cultures produced the fertile material that Manto needed for his writing, particularly his short fiction, but also his essays. His outstanding skill was for grasping Indianness. Stories like *Bu*, about a man in a flat who seduces a peasant woman and is intoxicated by the aroma of her armpit, represent for many the high watermark of Hindustani writing. It is difficult to think of better literature in our languages than his. This is the reason why, in his dismissal of Indians writing in languages other than English, Salman Rushdie made Manto the exception.

Living and working in Bombay was the happiest phase of Manto's

life. If it had not been for Partition, he would have lived and worked here till he died. But he recognized the viciousness that had been unleashed, and though he disliked it and was dismayed by it, he surrendered to its inevitability.

Manto accepts the fault and the culpability of his co-religionists first. This is something very few of us can still do in the subcontinent.

Anyway, it isn't surprising that he left Bombay, given his young family and the barbarism of those days, but the story of why he didn't return remains a mystery.

He died in Lahore at forty-two, having written the best critique of the creation of Pakistan and the lunacy of the puritanical State. A couple of pieces in this collection show how far- and clear-sighted he was about what the future would bring to a nation created in the name of religion.

One thing that emerged from Manto's migration was his transformation as a writer. The playfulness of Bombay was gone. His darkest pieces, and some absurdist ones, were written in the new country. Often, it is said, he scribbled pieces standing up in newspaper and magazine offices, taking his money in cash and being driven off in a tonga to get his fix of alcohol. Manto is thought to have drunk himself to death. However, in his writing one can find references only to beer, and his consumption of it during his years in Bombay was moderate. In fact only a bottle a day, as he reveals in the wonderful essay on his wedding. In another of his pieces, *My Fifth Trial (Part II)* or *Paanchvan Muqaddama (II),* he refers to downing fifteen bottles of beer on a train journey along with a companion, but he brandishes the figure as a threat to fellow passengers.

Manto is seen as a Pakistani writer because he wrote in Nastaliq, now a foreign script in India but the standard one then used by Punjabis and even in Hindi cinema of the Forties. Those who have read him in the original, or even heard his words recited by Naseeruddin Shah's magnificent troupe which performs his works, will know Manto's language as that of Bollywood: simple and plain Hindustani. He is an easy man to translate in that sense.

He is a great Indian writer, who wrote in an Indian language to an Indian audience about his Indian experiences. This is why he should be read in any language he can be accessed in. Most of these pieces were written for newspapers, and except for two, so far as I know, none have been translated before. I have edited, clipped, trimmed and rewritten a few of them, perhaps more than I should have. For this, Manto will forgive me.

Why I Write

In his lovely flat in Lahore's Lakshmi Mansion, which was given to him as refugee property, Saadat Hasan Manto wrote his pieces trying to scratch out a living. In this one he answers a question many writers are asked: how do you write? The Paris Review magazine has a section in which it asks writers to explain the way in which they go about their work. Manto was never interviewed in such a fashion, but here he attempts to tell us anyway. The flat he writes about, I visited many years ago. One of his daughters, Nighat, still lives there with her husband, Bashir Patel.

Ladies and gentlemen, I've been asked to say how it is that I write. Now I don't really understand the question and what "how" means. My dictionary informs me it means "in what manner?"

What can I say about this?

The best way of putting it is to say, well, I sit on a sofa in my living room, pile up a sheaf of paper, unscrew the cap of my fountain pen and begin to write.

My three little daughters play in the same room. I chat with them every so often. I settle their quarrels, sometimes while I'm tossing a salad for myself. Should someone drop in, I play host and chat with them too. But through all of this, I continue to write.

Now if I were to be asked WHY is it that I write, I have an answer for that too.

The most important reason is that I'm addicted to writing, just as I am to drinking. When I don't write, it feels like I'm unclothed, like I haven't had a bath. Like I haven't had my first drink.

I don't actually write the stories, mind you, they write themselves. And that shouldn't be surprising. You see, I haven't had much education. I have, however, written twenty books and I'm often astonished at the thought of who their writer could possibly be. Clearly, important enough a man to be taken to court so regularly for obscenity.

When the fountain pen is not in my hand, I'm merely Saadat Hasan. A man who knows and is able to express little. It is the pen that transforms me into Manto.

The story I'm working on is never on my mind or in my thoughts. It is always in my pocket, unnoticed. I keep exerting my mind so that it might squeeze out the opening paragraphs. But to no avail.

I try to "be" a writer of stories, putting on the air of one and holding the right pose. I light one cigarette after another. But nothing comes out.

In the end I tire and lie down like a spent woman, exhausted from the exertion of unwritten stories. Then I get up and do other things. I

feed the sparrows, take the trash out and play with my little girls. Their shoes, those tiny shoes dispersed about the house, I collect and put in their place.

The damned story, lying unnoticed in my pocket, doesn't come to mind. When the pressure begins to mount I retire to the toilet and sit on the pot, but nothing comes out there either.

It's said that every big man thinks in the loo. I can say with some evidence that I'm not a big man, for I've never had a productive thought there.

It's quite amazing that I'm considered one of Pakistan's and India's big writers. I can only say that it's possible that I've tricked them into believing this shit.

Forgive me. Now I'm speaking the language of the toilet.

Truth be told, I promise you I've no clue how is it that I write.

When I'm at a loss for ideas, my wife, who manages our finances, says sternly: 'Please stop thinking and begin writing.'

And so I pick up the pen and start scratching out a few lines. My mind is still empty — but by now, my pocket is full.

And of its own, as if by magic, a ripe story pops out.

In that sense, I don't consider myself a writer so much as a pickpocket. One who picks his own pocket and hands over its contents to you.

Have you ever seen such a fool as me?

— (Originally published as *Main Afsana Kyon Kar Likhta Hoon*)

The Story of My Wedding

Manto lived the early Bombay dream. He spent a little time in the film industry and found some success as a writer and a cultural figure. He was acquainted with some of the great names in the industry, as this piece shows, though he drops names very lightly. Here he tells us the story of how he got married to the girl from Mahim. Manto moved to Bombay from Amritsar and found a job in a magazine, and in a film company. He had little money, lived in a chawl and was fond of drinking. When his mother was horrified by his state, he said to her nonchalantly that he wasn't earning more only because he didn't need to. If he were married, he would immediately make more money. His mother then suggested he should marry, and in a moment he would come to regret, he said yes. Watch out for the personalities who play a part in this drama. Most are now forgotten, but in their hey days were giants of Indian cinema.

I've written somewhere that there were three significant events in my life.

The first was my birth, of which I have little information. The second was my wedding, the third my becoming a writer of short stories.

Since the episode of my writing is still on, it'll be getting ahead of myself to talk about it.

For those who want a glimpse into my life, I'm writing about the story of my wedding, which is also the story of my coming to Bombay. I'm not going to reveal every detail, mind you, some of the material will be elided over because it is not for public knowledge.

Let's start our story a little before the event. Over a decade ago — I can't remember the precise year — I was asked to leave Aligarh Muslim University. The reason was tuberculosis, which was thought to be incurable. Anyway, to recuperate, I took some money from my sister and went to Batot, a village on Jammu's border with Kashmir.

After three months, when I returned home to Amritsar, I learned of the death of my sister's little boy (she lived in Bombay and had returned there after a few days in Amritsar). I should say here that I had seen very little of my father before he died. When my simple and extremely kind mother had married my sister off, she gave her son-in-law all the money our family had.

My mother now realized this was a mistake and things had become so bad that we were utterly at the mercy of others. We were scraping along on forty rupees a month, that my two older brothers were sending. On top of that came the news of my nephew's death. On coming home, I was therefore in a sort of depression. I felt like running away from it all. I even had thoughts of killing myself (had I

stronger will than I do, I would have gone ahead with it).

Just then, I got a letter from Bombay. Mr Nazir, the owner of *Musawwar*, a weekly, wanted me to come over and edit the journal. I packed my stuff and set off immediately. I didn't even give it a thought, I now realize, how my mother would get by alone in Amritsar. But I

was off.

When I reached Bombay, Mr Nazir hired me for a salary of forty rupees a month. After he discovered that I was sleeping in the office, he began cutting two rupees from my salary towards rent every month. When he got me another job alongside, as a munshi at the Imperial Studios, on a salary of forty rupees, Mr Nazir cut my salary from *Musawwar* by half, to twenty rupees.

And, of course, he continued to cut two rupees as rent.

Now this was the time when the once-great Imperial Studios was in terrible shape. Its owner, Seth Ardeshir Irani, was trying very hard to set the company right, but it was obvious that in such a place, salaries would not be paid on time — and they weren't.

Seth Ardeshir's ambition led him to produce India's first colour film, and for this he imported expensive processing machines. The ambition was in keeping with his past. Seth Ardeshir had earlier made India's first talkie, *Alam Ara,* in 1931. When the company was made to bear the burden of the colour film, things went from bad to terrible. But work continued.

We didn't get our salaries, but were given a portion, called an "advance". The rest of it was owed to us and showed in the company's books.

The director of this colour film was, Moti B Gidwani. He was a man of literature and fond of me. He asked me to work on the film's script. I wrote it and, surprisingly, he liked it. But he could not bring himself to tell Seth Ardeshir that the story of India's first colour film had been written by a clerk.

It was decided to attribute the story to some famous person. At first no such man came to my mind. Then I remembered Prof Ziauddin, now dead, in Santiniketan. He taught Persian in Tagore's university. I wrote to him explaining my problem. He was fond of me, and agreed to participate in our little fraud.

The film released with a credit to him, and was a colossal flop*. The company's straits became even more dire. At this point, on Mr Nazir's recommendation, I was given a job in Film City for a hundred rupees a month, and I moved there.

When A R Kardar came to Bombay from Calcutta, Film City signed a deal with him for a movie. Stories began to be written,

including one by me which was liked by

Mr Kardar. Unfortunately, fate intervened.

Seth Ardeshir learnt that I was at Film City. Although he had lost some of his past influence, he could still command producers of his generation to do his bidding.

He gave such a dressing down to the owners of Film City for poaching me that I was taken by the ear and sent back to Imperial Studios, with my script.

My salary was now doubled to eighty rupees, and I was told I would be paid separately for my script. The film was being directed by Hafizji (of *Ratanbai* fame). When I had joined Film City, and was being paid regularly, I stopped sleeping at *Musawwar's* office and took up a room in a chawl, which was frankly, disgusting. A chawl is a building with long corridors on each floor to which are attached single rooms. The toilets are common and on the ground floor, all in a row. I paid nine rupees as rent for this hovel. The place was so full of bed bugs that they fell from the roof like rain.

Soon after, my mother came to Bombay, and stayed in my sister's flat in Mahim. When she came over to see me in my chawl, she wept. My relations with my brother-in-law were strained. I was banned from entering their house and he had forbidden my sister from meeting me. I found his behaviour appalling, though I hope god is merciful to him.

Anyway, I was speaking of my mother's tears. She noticed my poverty, the lack of clothes, my working at night in the light of a kerosene lamp. My eating in a cheap hotel. She saw all this and cried, for I had seen better days before.

For me, remembrance of things past has always been a waste of time, and what's the point of tears? I don't know. I've always been focussed on today. Yesterday and tomorrow hold no interest for me. What had to happen, did, and what will happen, will.

After she had cried her fill, my mother asked me: 'Saadat, why don't you earn more money?'

I replied: 'What will I do with more money, Bibi Jaan? What I earn is sufficient for me.'

She said sternly: 'No. The reality is that you cannot earn more than you do. If you had been more educated, it would have been different.'

That was true. But I had never been inclined towards studying. I failed in class twelve three times* before being admitted to college where my mind wandered even farther. I failed twice again. When I went to Aligarh Muslim University, as I've told you before, I was booted out for having tuberculosis, and that was hardly my fault.

Despite all this, I tried to laugh off my mother's concern. 'Bibi

Jaan, what I earn is enough for me. Now if I had a wife, you would see what I am capable of earning. It's not very difficult to make money here, you know. A man can make a fortune even without a proper education.'

After hearing this, my mother asked suddenly: 'Will you marry, then?'

I replied without a thought: 'But of course.'

'Then come to Mahim on Sunday,' she said, 'and wait on the footpath under the flat. I'll come down on seeing you.'

She put her hand on my head. 'We'll arrange your marriage, Inshallah.'

As she left, she turned back: 'But look! Make sure you cut your hair before you come.'

I didn't get that haircut.

However for some reason, I did manage to put black polish on my canvas shoes. I had to pay twice the usual rate to get them cleaned and white again.

That Sunday I wore them with my white slacks and went to meet my mother. I reached Mahim and stood on the footpath in front of Evening Leto Mansions as she had asked me to. Mother was waiting in the balcony of my sister's third floor flat. She came down and asked me to walk with her.

But only twenty-five feet down the road, and we stopped at a building, Jaffer House. We went to the third floor, where Mother knocked on a door. A maid opened and we went in. Mother went into the ladies' quarter of the flat. I was welcomed by a middle-aged man who was fair and good-looking. He took me into the living room and sat me down with great affection. He was informal and put me at ease immediately. We began to chat and soon told each other what was important about ourselves.

His name was Malik Hasan. He worked for the government, and had an interesting job. He was a fingerprint specialist with the police. His salary, and this is the level of detail he was comfortable revealing, was reasonably good. He had fathered many children. He liked, and this was interesting also, to bet on horses and gamble. He filled out the crossword every morning but hadn't won any prize doing this. This was what I learnt about him.

I told him everything about myself, holding back nothing. That I worked in the movies, for a company that didn't pay salaries, except an advance intermittently so that employees would not be reduced to begging.

I was amazed that when I revealed to him I drank, even in such straightened circumstances, a bottle of beer every evening, he did not react negatively. He heard all that I had to say intently and with great

interest.

When I rose to leave, Mr Hasan knew every page from my book of life. As we walked back, Mother said the family had come to Bombay from Africa. 'They know your brothers well,' she said. Mr Hasan had been a barrister for ten years in East Africa, she added, and that was why I had been summoned to Mahim on this Sunday. They were in the process of finding a groom for a girl in the family.

Many proposals had come and had been rejected as unsuitable. What they wanted was someone from a Kashmiri family, like ours. 'I've told them about you and kept nothing hidden,' she said. Well, that was it then. Whatever I had omitted to reveal in my own candid session, Mother had fulfilled in hers.

What could this lead to, I asked myself. That they would agree to me as the man for this girl, I could not imagine. There was, I'm being honest here rather than modest, nothing about me that would make me fit for her or any other respectable girl.

I had put all these thoughts behind me by the time Mr Malik invited me home the next Sunday. He was once again very warm and gracious as a host. Lunch was soon served.There was chicken, meat koftas, vegetable curry and a delicious chutney of *dhaniya-pudina* (coriander-mint) and pomegranate. Actually all of it was delicious — but so hot that sweat broke on my brow. Soon, however, I became used to the spice and enjoyed the meal.

After a couple of more Sunday invitations, I met the family and became familiar with them. After this, one day Mother said to me without warning: 'They've agreed to give her to you.'

Now, as I told you, I had laughed off this business of getting married. But when I heard her words, I was staggered. That someone would give me their daughter — especially after knowing me! — I had not imagined possible.

What exactly did I have on offer as a suitable candidate? I had had no proper education after passing my twelfth standard (in the third division). I was employed in a place that paid *bits* of salaries, not salaries. And my line of work was films and journalism. Such men are not welcome in the company of the gentry. My house was in a slum (and even that I had to pull strings to get after the landlord found out I was involved in films). I wasn't ready to do this, not prepared at all. And when my mother added that she had agreed to the proposal on my behalf, I began to panic. I didn't show or say anything that indicated my feelings, but my thoughts turned immediately to how I could be rid of this disaster that, truth be told, I had invited upon myself.

After much thought and consideration, I came to the conclusion that both were useless. I surrendered to my fate: I would just go ahead

and not resist, I decided. Although I had made up my mind, the truth was I was still broke. How would I pay for the ceremony? This was troubling, especially because by now, the company had stopped paying even the “advance” that it infrequently did earlier.

Meanwhile news came from Mother that she had set a date. I thought of running away from Bombay, but some strange power held my feet.

Only one unpleasant solution came to mind — that I confront my employer, Seth Ardeshir Irani, with the news of my wedding and get some money out of him.

The company owed me one and a half thousand rupees. Now if I got this money, I’d be free of worry. Heck, I would be rolling in it.

And so I walked up to Mr Irani. He didn’t have the time to hear me at length. Whatever I could say to him as he walked from one place to another, he heard on sufferance.

Then he said to me: ‘Look Manto, you’re aware of the company’s state. If it were healthy, I’d have married you off myself.’ This was true. He was a large-hearted man and many employees in the past had seen the measure of his generosity.

But now he had little to offer and I could see the despair on his face at not being able to give me my dues.

You can imagine how disappointed I was. I had in fact begun to walk away when he called out to me. ‘I can only do this — buy you things necessary for the wedding,’ he said, ‘go call Hafiz.’

I ran to get Mr Hafiz and Mr Irani gave us the names of a few shops. He wrote something on a chit and said: ‘Take Munshi Manto with you and get him whatever he needs.’

We set off in a car and came to a market. Here I picked out a couple of saris. These were debited to Mr Irani’s personal account. Next stop was the jeweller’s. Here an assistant was sent with me, because I had wanted the girl to choose her wedding ornaments herself. We reached Jaffer House. The girl’s mother, whom I called Aunty, was shown the ornaments by the jeweller’s man. She picked out a diamond ring, a pair of pearl earrings, a pendant and some bangles. I pleaded with her to take more, but she didn’t want it to be an expensive deal for me.

I wish I had said to her: ‘Aunty, such an opportunity will not come again. They owe me one and a half thousand rupees.’

Unfortunately, I didn’t and all of this came to only four or five hundred rupees. I never got the rest, and a few days later, the company folded up. Now Mr Nazir, in whose magazine *Musawwar* I worked, doubled my salary back to forty rupees. This was a relief, and I could continue downing that bottle of beer every evening (which was important).

I began to suspect that this wedding was ill-omened. I had no support in getting it organized. I neither had friends in Bombay nor loved ones. I had a sister here, true, but I was forbidden from even entering her house. I had to do all the work for the event myself. People had to be invited, stuff had to be bought — not to forget that I needed a haircut.

But I was at it. One day, as I was returning after giving the wedding invitation to Syed Fazal Shah, owner of Shah Jahan Mahal Hotel, I slipped and fell on some stones. I fell so hard and hurt myself so badly that I fainted. Now I've fainted only three times in my life. This was the first time. The second time was on hearing the news of my mother's death. The third when my son died.

This falling and fainting was certainly not a good sign and I was convinced now that the wedding was going to be a disaster.

Anyway, I bought what was needed from the market, and reached Jaffer House for the nikah. My body sang out in pain as I climbed up the stairs to their flat and entered a totally different atmosphere, a festive place.

There were fifteen to twenty people at Jaffer House when I reached there for the ceremony. I sat down with the support of a cushion. I couldn't bend my injured leg and so sat with it extended, and I accept it was very bad manners.

When Qazi Markhe (yes, I thought it was a weird name too) asked me to sit in the formal fashion, I swallowed my pain and knelt as prescribed for Muslims. When the ritual was over, I was relieved and straightened my leg immediately, with waves of pain shooting through it. I accepted the congratulations and limped my way back home.

I lit a kerosene lamp in my chawl and, lying on the bug-infested bed, began to marvel at the fact that I was married now. It's true that my wife was still absent from this nine-rupee-a-month dump that I called home. But legally, I could ask her to move in with me and there was something to be said for that.

I dared not ask her, of course. What would I feed her — the stuff I got from the Irani nearby (and that too, on credit)? Where would I keep her? This place had neither furniture nor any space to keep it. And where would she bathe? There was no bathroom here. It was a two-storeyed building with forty rooms. For everyone there were only two shared toilets, whose doors had vanished somewhere.

Sooner or later, she would move in with me. Then? How would I play the role of a husband? The thought tormented me.

I had slept with three women before, but they were all maids. We had had sex almost accidentally, two adults with needs, and then moved on, as strangers who brush against one another in a crowded

street and soon forget.

I had no experience of treating a lady in the right manner. I was convinced I couldn't be a husband, a homely man. It wasn't the same thing as an essayist or a short story writer.

Time went by. I got a job for a hundred rupees a month at Saroj Movietone. I'm convinced the bloody place was waiting for me. I had not been there two months when it folded up.

Then the owner, Seth Nanubhai Desai snared a Marwari and got him to invest in the firm, which was now renamed Hindustan Cinetone. I wrote my second script for this "new" firm, which I called *Keechad*. This was changed to *Apni Nagariya* — an awful name, but the movie went on to do well.

While this was going on, one day Mother said that she had announced the date when the bride would be brought home. It had been a year since the wedding, but I had made no preparation for this. My in-laws were impatient and who could blame them? Left to myself, I would have never wanted the day to come.

It wasn't that I was lazy, I didn't want the girl to ruin her life and I knew I would be terrible at this married life business. But the day of apocalypse was now at hand.

Meanwhile the paper I was also working part-time, *Musawwar* had begun to turn in a handsome profit for its owner, Mr Nazir. We moved to a nicer building, to an office with a telephone. Mr Nazir bought himself a little car in which he drove around all day, selling advertising for the paper.

My schedule every Sunday was to go to my in-laws' in Mahim for a meal, sometimes catching a half-glimpse of my wife, with whom I had never been alone. Later, I hated myself for putting her — and myself — through this, but it was too late to whine.

Ten days before her arrival, I rented a flat in the same building as the *Musawwar* office. The rent was thirty-five rupees, and my salary from the paper, forty. I told

Mr Nazir to settle the rent directly each month, and that left me with five rupees with which I had to feed myself and my wife. Terrific!

I cleaned up the flat nicely. The floor and the doors were filthy and I gave them a good scrubbing with caustic soda. With hope in my heart and a new-found confidence, I presented myself before Nanubhai Desai. I catalogued to him how much was owed to me for the script and as salary arrears. When in response Nanubhai made it clear that he couldn't pay me a paisa given his circumstances, I lost it.

I said a few words in anger (and a couple of words of abuse may have slipped out as well). This resulted in my being thrown out

physically.

I immediately telephoned Baburao Patel, the editor of *Film India*. I told him that if Nanubhai did not settle my dues, I would go on a hunger strike.

Now Baburao was aware of my predicament and was disturbed. He called Nanubhai and said: 'Look, if Manto goes on this hunger strike, the press will unite against you. It's better to find a solution and resolve this.'

Nothing was solved over the phone, but then Baburao went to meet Nanubhai at his office and I was called in. Nanubhai apologized to me, and I to him. Then it was offered that we settle this with my being paid half of what was owed and letting the other half go, since the company was in dire straits.

I agreed and got a post-dated cheque for nine hundred rupees. When I called Nanubhai a few days later and said I was going to encash it, he told me to come see him before I did so. He told me with a sad face that there was nothing in the bank. Could I not agree to five hundred rupees in cash instead?

I agreed immediately, even though of my hard-earned eighteen hundred rupees, half had already been let go and another four hundred sliced off through this compromise. I was desperate, with only four days left for my bride to come home.

With the cash in my pocket, I took the company car, which had no petrol in it, filled up its tank and went to the market where I bought some saris. I returned home, with my pockets again empty of money. And the flat, of course, was just as empty of furniture. Not even a busted chair in sight.

In the office was a kindly old man and I confided in him, saying that I was about to bring my bride into a shell of a flat. He came to my aid and took me to a place that made and sold furniture, whose owner was a friend of his. I got some stuff on easy installments: two metal cots with springs, a cabinet for kitchen equipment and vessels, a dressing table (this was second-hand), a writing table and a chair.

When I installed all of this, I was disappointed. The rooms were as capacious as ships. They swallowed up the furniture. I bought two stools which I set up in the corners, but these too were lost. I got some more things from here and there and began to place them around the flat trying to convince myself (unsuccessfully) that it was now filled up.

And then the day arrived.

I was sitting that morning in the *Musawwar* office, and my mother was in the flat. I'd told her I was off to make arrangements for the function. Mr Nazir had sent off invites to people, many of whom were from the entertainment business. My baraat would be a filmi one.

How appropriate.

There would be Mian Kardar, Director Gunjali, famous actors, A Billimoria and D Billimoria, Noor Mohammed "Charlie", comedian Mirza Musharraf, Baburao Patel and the first colour film's heroine, Padma Devi.

When Baburao learnt that only my mother would receive the guests at home, he sent Padma Devi to help out.

I had rented some chairs and from the Irani nearby came bottles of Vimto. I could easily cover the expense for these. What was bothering me, as I sat in the office of *Musawwar*, was how would I run the house from tomorrow?

Just then, the phone rang. It was my sister, who had been forbidden by her husband from meeting me and who couldn't therefore be there when I would bring my bride home. 'How are you, Saadat?' she asked. I told her I was well and had four-and-a-half annas in my pocket. Four annas would buy me a tin of cigarettes and two paise would go for a box of matches. After that, who knew? She then said: 'Please stop opposite my flat when you come to pick her up. I want to see you.'

I didn't chat with her further, because she was becoming overly emotional. I hung up, rose and went to the saloon next door to get a haircut (on credit) and took a shower. By evening I had smoked my way through the tin of cigarettes. All I had in my pockets now — and remember I was just about to pick up my bride — was half a box of matches. Anyway, I changed into the suit gifted to me by my in-laws. I wore a tie too. When I looked into the mirror, a cartoonish character stared back. I laughed heartily.

Before the street lights were turned on, the baraatis were all present and ready. Padma Devi and Mother served them Vimto and were off. Our caravan of ten-fifteen cars wound its way to Mahim. I was in Nanubhai's car and told the driver when we reached Jaffer House to drive on a little further up the road. My sister was waiting on the footpath. Tears were swimming in her eyes and she ran her hand over me with love and blessed me. I fled back into the car before it got too much and told the driver to back it up to Jaffer House.

There, my mother-in-law had done a superb job of setting up refreshments on the terrace. It was a raucous evening, as might be expected of film people, and Rafiq Ghaznavi, Director Nanda and Agha Khalish Kashmiri were at each other the entire evening. Everyone overate because the spread was absolutely delicious, as might be expected of us, Kashmiris.

Agha Saheb read out some verses from a poem he had written and then I was called downstairs and handed charge of the girl. It now felt like a dream.

Many thoughts, some long suppressed, were coursing through me. I held her hand and said, my voice trembling, ‘Let’s go, then.’

We came down. Billimoria gave us his car. My mother was with me and sat the bride down first. She sat next and then asked me to get in. Mother sat between my bride and me. On her lap, wrapped in muslin, was the Quran. Our necks were laden with garlands. As the car started, Mother began to mutter some verses. Till now I was to some extent, in control of my passions. I thought of playing some mischief with my wife, but mother was between us. And on top of that reciting from the holy book. My desire to torment my wife remained unfulfilled. I can’t remember how long it took for us to get home — or how we got there. Suddenly, we were there.

It was a building made more with stick than stone, but elegant in its time. Apparently it was once a grand hotel that His Highness, Sir Aga Khan had won from a friend as a bet.

Mother took my bride up to the flat. I stood there, thanking my friends for coming. Just then, Mirza Musharraf arrived with a truck which was carrying the bride’s dowry. A dining table and chairs came out, then a bed with springs, a sofa set, some trunks and so on.

After this was unloaded, Mirza Musharraf got into a squabble with the trucker over the fare. This went on for a long time. I waited.

Mirza Musharraf gave a display of why he played the buffoon with such ease on screen. After it ended and the stuff was placed here and there, wherever space could be found in the flat, Mirza Musharraf came to me and whispered: ‘Look boy, make sure you don’t embarrass us with your performance in bed.’

I was utterly spent by this time and gave no reply to the clown.

The next morning I rose to find that one quarter of me had magically turned husband. I was relieved to feel this way.

Out in the balcony, I saw a piece of string with stuff hanging from it, drying, fluttering in the wind.

And so it had begun.

— (Originally published as *Meri Shadi*)

* the film was *Kisan Kanya*, released in 1937
* Manto actually failed in Urdu

Hindi or Urdu?

As the freedom movement took off, so did a dispute about what the official language of India should be. Some said Hindi because it was spoken by more people, others said Urdu because much of jurisprudence and history was in it. Gandhi's instruction was that all Indians should learn Hindustani language in both its Devnagari and Persian scripts. But it soon became a religious dispute. Manto found the whole thing stupid as this piece shows.

I must admit to giggling along as I translated this sitting in my garden. It's the sort of silly Indian conversation that must be read or overheard (or imagined) in an Indian language.

Hindi and Urdu have been fighting for some time now. Maulvi Abdul Haq, Dr Tara Chandji and Mahatma Gandhi understand the details of the squabble but I confess, it is beyond me. And it isn't that I haven't tried.

Why do Hindus waste their time in supporting Hindi? And why are Muslims anxious to protect Urdu?

Languages are not created, they make themselves and no human effort can destroy one already made.

I started to write an essay on this subject, but what came out instead, as I put pen to paper, was a conversation. Here's how it went:

Munshi Narayan Prasad: 'Iqbal saheb, are you going to have this bottle of soda?'

Mirza Mohammad Iqbal: 'Yes I am.'

Munshi: 'Why don't you have a lemon soft drink like me instead?'

Iqbal: 'Just so. I like soda. Our family has always had soda.'

Munshi: 'So you dislike lemon?'

Iqbal: 'Not at all. Why should I dislike it, Munshi Narayan Prasad? Since it was always soda at home, it's now become a habit. Nothing special. In fact I'd say that lemon is tastier than soda.'

Munshi: 'Which is why I was astonished that you would choose to set aside something sweet in favour of something bland. And lemon's not only sweet but also fragrant. What do you think?'

Iqbal: 'You're absolutely right. But…'

Munshi: 'But what?'

Iqbal: 'Nothing. I was about to say that I'll stick to soda.'

Munshi: 'Aren't you being stubborn? Someone might think I'm forcing you to down poison instead of a fizzy lemon drink. Arrey bhai, what's really the difference between lemon and soda? Both bottled in the same factory. Both filled in by the same machines. If we were to remove from lemon the sugar and the essence, what would we be left with?'

Iqbal: ‘Soda.’

Munshi: ‘Exactly. Then what’s the problem with having lemon?’

Iqbal: ‘No problem at all.’

Munshi: ‘Excellent. Then here — have mine.’

Iqbal: ‘What will you have?’

Munshi: ‘I’ll call for another bottle.’

Iqbal: ‘You don’t need to. What’s wrong with having this soda?’

Munshi: ‘No… problem… as… such.’

Iqbal: ‘So have it.’

Munshi: ‘What will you have then?’

Iqbal: ‘Me… I’ll ask for another bottle.’

Munshi: ‘You don’t need to. What’s wrong with having this lemon?’

Iqbal: ‘Nothing wrong at all. What’s the problem with having this soda?’

Munshi: ‘No problem at all.’

Iqbal: ‘The thing is that soda is a little better.’

Munshi: ‘In my opinion, lemon is a little better.’

Iqbal: ‘Must be. But I’ve heard from my elders that soda is better.’

Munshi: ‘What of it? Even I’ve heard from my elders — lemon is better.’

Iqbal: ‘What’s your personal opinion?’

Munshi: ‘What’s your personal opinion?’

Iqbal: ‘My opinion… My view… Is that… But why don’t you tell me what your opinion is?’

Munshi: ‘My opinion… My view… Is that… But why must I reveal my opinion first?’

Iqbal: ‘This way we’ll never know. Let’s both cover our bottles and settle this at leisure.’

Munshi: ‘That’s not possible. The bottles are already open. Now we’ll have to drink from them. Decide quickly, else we’ll lose all the gas. And the gas is the main thing in these drinks.’

Iqbal: ‘I agree. And I see you also accept that there’s no real difference between lemon and soda.’

Munshi: ‘When did I say there’s no difference between lemon and soda? There’s a lot of difference. Lemon has sweetness, fragrance, sourness. That is, three things more than soda. What does soda have? Only gas — and so much of it that it gets into the nose. Compared to this, lemon is delicious! Have a bottle and you’ll be good for hours. Soda is for those who are unwell. And you admitted a while ago that lemon was tastier than soda.’

Iqbal: ‘All right. But I didn’t accept that lemon is better than soda. Being more tasty doesn’t necessarily mean it’s more beneficial. Pickle is very tasty but you know how bad it can be for you. Merely being

fragrant and sour doesn't make something good or better. Ask any doctor and you'll know that sourness brings indigestion. But soda! Now here's a great thing for digestion.'

Munshi: 'Look, let's settle this by mixing the two.'

Iqbal: 'I've no objection.'

Munshi: 'Then fill that glass half with soda.'

Iqbal: 'Why don't you fill it half with lemon first?'

Munshi: 'What's this? Why don't you want to pour it first?'

Iqbal: 'I want to have a mix of soda-lemon.'

Munshi: 'And I want to have a mix of lemon-soda.'

— (Originally published as *Hindi Aur Urdu*, in *Manto Ke Mazameen*, 1954)

Thirteen Types of Freeloaders

The Second World War brought severe shortages to India as goods and services were diverted to the war effort in Europe. The army had been expanded and consumed vast quantities of foodstuff. These were rationed across India, as also were cigarettes, which now had to be got from the black market. Manto was always short of money, and often in debt. His circle of friends was mostly writers, poets and artists, none of whom was particularly well off either. How did such people manage? With difficulty. Manto tells us in this piece about how people regularly bummed cigarettes off him.

Type 1:

You're watching a movie. You take a cigarette out of your pocket. The man on the next seat is a freeloader. He'll stare at your tin and say, 'Where do you get these from, sir? The black market?'

'Yes,' you say.

'Oh,' he says, 'I've been looking for them for a long time. Can't find them anywhere. It's a great smoke, isn't it?'

'Be my guest,' you say, holding out the tin.

'Thanks.'

During the interval, he'll hit you for one unsolicited. 'I enjoyed the first half, thanks to you. Another would really seal it.'

Type 2:

You've boarded a train. It sets off. You pull out your packet. The man next to you begins to pat his pockets. He then says something. Like, 'Damn!' or 'Not again!'

You're certain to ask: 'What's wrong?'

He' ll smile and say, 'Nothing really, forgot my cigarettes in the tonga.'

'Oh,' you say, 'for now, smoke mine.'

And he will. Several times.

Type 3:

Zaid is your friend. But you haven't figured out he's a freeloader. Every day he puts his arm around your shoulder, sighs and says, '*Lao bhai, ab cigarette pilvao'* (Come brother, give me a cigarette) as if he were doing you a favour by smoking your quota.

Type 4:

You're on a park bench. The man next to you is focussed on his book. You pull out a tin of cigarettes. He's a freeloader. He quickly strikes a match and holds it out for you. You in turn offer him a cigarette. He thanks you.

Type 5:

You're acquainted with Bakr, but not too well. Not enough to

know he's one of them. He offers you his packet. You take it, but it's empty, of course.

He's shocked to know this, and expresses his regret. You take out your stock and offer one to him.

Type 6:

This is a special type of freeloader who only smokes particular brands. The moment he sees a friend or acquaintance bearing 555 or Craven A cigarettes*, he cries out in joy — 'Zindabad! Now here's a cigarette worth smoking.'

He'll light one and stuff six or seven in his pocket: 'Sorry, but I can't do with just one.'

Type 7:

This is an unusual type. You're standing with your friends outside the YMCA Hall. You put a cigarette in your mouth and are about to strike a match. A man walking past quickly turns into you and takes the cigarette from your lips, and the match from your hands. He lights it, and then walks off, puffing.

You think he's mad (he isn't) and this is the subject of your discussion for some time.

Type 8:

This is a particularly brazen type. You're fed-up with him and say: 'Boss, why don't you smoke your own?'

He replies: 'I've promised never to smoke cigarettes I've bought myself. Smoking those that others have paid for is far more pleasurable. You should try it.'

Type 9:

Slightly different from **Type 8:**

You're fed up with him and say: 'Boss, why don't you smoke your own?'

He replies: 'The doctor says I shouldn't be smoking. If I carry them on me, I can't control myself. That's why every now and then I ask for one from a friend…'

Type 10:

This one is like a court poet.

'I swear to god, Manto is a prince among men when it comes to cigarettes. You may not find a good cigarette anywhere in the world, but he'll be carrying one for certain. My friend, show us what you're carrying these days.'

You pull out your pack of cheap smokes.

'You and Capstan?' he exclaims, 'Hmm, it's sure to have something good about it, then. Let's have a look.'

Type 11:

This one attacks not just a cigarette but your entire tin. 'Sorry man, I'm taking it,' he says with regret, 'I've left mine at another

friend's place.' Or he says, 'Give me two tins. My stock's coming tomorrow or the day after. I'll return them…'

Type 12:

The sort of extreme freeloader, seeing whom people tighten their grip on the cigarettes in their fingers. And they throw away their half-empty packet on the ground in his sight, as if it were empty.

Type 13:

The type who'll chat with you for some time and then, as he's leaving, pick up the half-empty pack you had tossed away, saying: 'I'll take this for my boy. He loves playing with empty boxes.'

— (Originally published as *Muft Noshon Ki Terah Qismein*

in *Talkh, Tarsh Aur Shireen*, 1954)

* the brand smoked by M A Jinnah

How Arms Control Works

Manto lived through the Second World War and his most productive writing years in India were between 1939–1945. This was the period when nations had converted industrial factories into armament-producing units and the world was awash with weapons. The theory of deterrence was also used, although this was a surprise because it was before the nuclear age. Manto's response to this development was to write a farcical essay, which was published in 1942, while he was still working in Bollywood. It was only after Partition that his writing became very dark.

International relations is so complex that to understand it is tiresome. In fact one can get lost in that maze if one enters to figure it out.

I'm sure you've read about the threat of weapons of mass destruction at least twenty times. But tell me the truth — have you really understood how deterrence works? I don't think so.

I'm not questioning your intelligence, mind you. It's just that recently has the thing dawned on me and what I've understood about the subject can be put so simply that even a child would not be confused. Interested?

Imagine that you and I are slightly less clever than we are. It's possible that I possess a pillow and it's likely that at some point I thump your head with it. Now it's possible that you in turn possess an egg, which you proceed to smash on my face. My pillow and your egg are weapons of mass destruction — you follow?

To bring about peace, we call a conference on the threat from these weapons. The result of our conference is that we agree to giving you the right to possess a pillow and me the right to possess an egg.

Both now have the material needed to retaliate in equal fashion if attacked. This ensures peace. Neither of us has the right to increase our arsenal without consulting the other, because this would threaten the peace.

After some time, however, I bring to your notice your ownership of a pen knife which could, logically, double up as a weapon.

You in turn point to the axe in my shed — using which I could sever your head with one swing. These discoveries suddenly produce in both of us strong and neighbourly yearnings for maintaining the peace. And so I get myself a pen knife and you add to your property an axe, though you don't have a garden.

Now, just as it happens so often in international relations, things sour between us. I come over and tell you that since I'm threatened by the equilibrium between us, I should be better off getting a pistol from the market. Your response is to be alarmed and to get a pistol as well

as a glittering sword.

To be safe, I get a sword and purely to ensure my security, I get a machine gun and mount it on my car.

Surely peace should break out anytime now. But then you go off to an arms dealer and buy a tank. You also get a bomb which can blow the roof of my house clean off.

Yours truly notices and gets a couple of bombs for himself. I also order (just in case) a couple of cylinders of poisonous gas. The gas can turn you and your children a pale yellow and the skin of your faces the texture of roasted brinjal.

In response you look for a gas that can make my head, my arms and my legs entirely vanish from my torso. You also buy a fighter-bomber and park it in your compound.

We have collected so much explosive material inside our homes now that it's impossible to think of war.

Even so, we soon fight and destroy ourselves. However, this is incidental and shouldn't be blamed on us because at least we tried so hard to keep the peace.

— (Originally published as *Tahdeed-e-Asliha*)

Beautiful Girls will be Harassed

Trust Manto to take up a subject as unusual as the forcible interaction between sexes — what we call eve-teasing and molestation in India — and write a long essay on it. What strikes one on reading this essay written during pre-Independence is how playful Manto was before Partition. His title is a reference to Ghalib's couplet: "Yaar se chhed chali jaye 'Asad, Gar nahin vasl to hasrat hee sahi". Manto uses the Indian word chhed, meaning to annoy. It does not have the fully negative sentiment of "molest", and retains some of the playfulness of "tease".*

If not the ecstasy of union, then the sorrow of unrequited love. And so, till men have no access to union with women, they will continue to harass and tease women, and to molest them.

So how did all this actually begin? Who was the first man to have teased a woman? History books are silent on this for some reason. It's possible that in some thicket of Eden's garden, or in the shade of one of its trees, Adam began this tradition. It cannot be for nothing that he was booted out of that paradise.

But even if we were to assume that it was Adam who began this pleasant tradition, it's not easy to figure out how it happened. His attempt could have been crude, or he must have been extremely elegant in his approach — it's difficult for us to say which. We have little knowledge of those times.

We can't even guess what reaction this produced in Eve and how she must have responded to the masculine overture. Many things come to my mind while imagining it. It resembles something like a scene from a nudist club in America. Adam as a white man and Eve, his madam.

If not the ecstasy of union, then the sorrow of unrequited love.

In Europe, which is living out an age of civilization and culture, there is more union and fewer sighs of unrequited love. But even so, teasing and harassment is commonly found there too.

Their women, uncovered of face and often of body, are stared and ogled at just as we stare in India at whatever bit of our women is on display. And Europeans are bolder in their approach than us. This is counter-intuitive, but the hunger for flesh cannot be sated just by having one's fill.

As long as men are put next to women, this harassment will happen. There might come a time when women's existence is no longer necessary for men and this will stop by itself. But not before that time is this going to end.

The other day Gandhiji wrote of the educated girls of India saying, 'Each of these Juliets has a hundred Romeos behind her.' At

this there was such an extreme reaction in Lahore that the heavens trembled.

Ms Mumtaz Shahnawaz and other girls gave a strong response to Gandhiji. For many days, even veiled women wrote essays in Indian papers against this half-covered man. But Gandhiji did not soften his opinion. He wrote another piece, addressing boys and targeted them with his ahimsa-tipped arrows. He said to them: 'When you walk in the bazaar, keep your gaze down. Wear a hood so that your eyes don't light upon the faces of young girls. Thus you'll hold on to your virtue.'

Gandhiji's hold on India is intact. But alas, his essay had little effect on India's young men. Pretty women continued to be teased and molested. The censor could not control the young men's eyes. Their horny selves remained intact. Gandhiji's attempt was as much of a failure, in fact, as that of the Congress' to impose prohibition in Bombay.

But if it had succeeded, think of what a change Gandhiji's advice would have brought to this country. We would have seen our young men walk around the streets with hoods on their heads and with their gazes lowered. There would have been chaotic traffic: accidents caused by this every day. And the victims would all be men. Hood on head, eyes down, directly in the path of cars coming at them. With young girls, ungazed at, walking about here and there. Horns being sounded even louder than they are now. The hospitals would soon be filled up with wounded young men. And there too the poor fellows would presumably be hooded so as to not accidentally catch sight of the young nurses.

Anyway, let's put this *hood-wood* business behind us. It would have made life immensely boring. Passions, like still water, would not stir. All excitement would come to an end if men were physically stopped from engaging with women. No spark would be produced between two strangers. The intoxication of youth would sober up. The world all around would turn serious and grim. Faces would become longer. Their glow would vanish. Deprived of an essential motivation, men would turn sluggish.

We would also destroy our culture of poetry and literature.

This didn't happen because it is impossible for it to happen.

Every adult man, each adult woman knows why this sort of teasing happens. It happens because it isn't unnatural. Here, it won't be out of place for me to reveal the information I got from interviewing some young men on this subject.

These are the questions I asked the men:

Why do you tease girls and women? Can you tell me a reason you do this?

What particular type of girl or woman do you target?

How do you go about it?

Do you think the girls and women like to be teased in this manner?

Tell me an episode of teasing that has stayed on in your mind.

I put these five questions to twelve boys who were between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four. Seven of them could not give me a coherent reply to the first question. The other five answered similarly. They more or less said: we harass girls and women because we enjoy the act of doing so.

In particular, harassing those who cannot or do not protest, who keep their anger silent. It's impossible to describe the joy in engaging with them.

We tease them because we are driven to doing this, at times unconsciously. Often the most gorgeous girl passes by and we do nothing. It's a question of mood. If we are in that space, no girl can pass without being engaged by us.

At times we have to listen to abuse, and sometimes we are in a position of danger. After this, for a while, our passions are subdued. But then again they stir.

There's no question of exploiting the helplessness of a woman. But we don't think of it as helplessness, because she's not within our reach. Her thoughts and feelings are not known to us so we just see her as some unreachable object that we want. Like a kite on a branch that we throw pebbles at.

You ask why we tease girls, we ask why shouldn't we? If we don't, who will? Our relations with them have always been such that a little teasing is required every now and then.

Of these five boys, one was twenty-four. He was sharp. His ability to think and respond was better than the others. He said to me — 'You'll get the answer to why we tease girls soon enough. But tell me this, I passed a dog in the market the other day and winked at it. If you asked me why I did this, I'd have no reply. Why do you think I did this instinctively?'

To the second question, eight of the boys answered as follows: 'We like teasing girls who appeal to us all of a sudden. Often they are ordinary looking, often extraordinarily beautiful. It all depends on what is it that excites us. We believe those girls generate this feeling in us. The sentiment is always within us — it is she who does something to stir it.'

Two other boys said: 'We only tease plump and overweight girls. We've never gone after the slim ones. It's great to tease girls who are heavy of body.'

One of them said: ‘In the bazaar or on the street, when I see a fatty I always wink at her. It brings a special feeling. It feels like my wink has darted into and penetrated her soft body. Fat girls are in any case shy and self-conscious. When they flare up in embarrassment at my actions, a surge of pleasure goes through me.’

To the third question, ten boys gave more or less the same answer. That while there were many ways of teasing girls, what they preferred to do was to wink at them. This was not particularly dangerous to do, and one didn’t have to be close to do it. It could be done effectively even from a distance. It also gave satisfaction because it was a complete act. It was mischievous more than anything else, but the act held within it the question — ‘So, what do you say?’

That split second’s act communicates the message of a thousand questions. It produces either anger or fear or shame that is immediately broadcast by the girl’s entire body. Winking is not dangerous because it leaves no evidence and is difficult to prove one did it. Just do it, watch her face brighten up in reaction and move on. Sometimes they even smile.

And her smile stays with them for a long time. It contains within it a fleeting emotion, touching you like the wings of a butterfly, briefly, and then it’s gone. If you left the eyes aside, other than the voice only the hands remained as instruments of engaging with girls. The boys said they used them, but rarely.

‘Because hands can’t be controlled once they’re in contact. And then there’s trouble to be had. Of course, when there’s a big crowd and much confusion, it’s fine to feel a girl up. Or places where they are concentrating on something, for instance, a man riding in the well of death. There it’s easy to do something to her and not even be noticed. Sometimes we rub ourselves against them and walk on. Sometimes just put our shoulder into them as they walk past. These are the ways in which we do it.’

Of the other two boys, one said: ‘I’ve never winked at a girl. I know this is done, and I’ve seen other boys do it. But I can never do it right. When I tried, the other eye would also shut itself and that ruined it. I’ve never molested anyone with my hands either. My style is different and actually unique. I always walk up to a girl and ask for the time. It is only girls with watches on their wrist whom I approach. No girl has ever refused to reply. But very few actually consult their watches before telling me the “time”. This is because they’re quite jumpy when suddenly approached with this question. They can’t refuse an answer because it’s impolite. I also put on an air of urgency, as if I have to be somewhere and am running late. In five years, I’ve done this 157 times.’

The other boy said: ‘I only do it verbally. I’ve tried winking but it

gives me little pleasure. I call out such a line that only the targeted girl understands that I'm making a pass. To be able to do it in a manner that nobody else figures out is an art. But such lines cannot be composed all the time. Only when the mind is alive and alert. And when it is, the pleasure I get is indescribably good.'

To the fourth question, nine of the boys answered almost exactly the same way: 'We don't think girls like our teasing them. This is because a man and a woman can never have a comfortable relationship unless they are man and wife. A woman looks at a man as a lamb looks at the butcher. In the man's imagination, she stands on a taut rope of chastity. Even when we think of the teasing as harmless entertainment, they weigh it in a delicate balance of sin and virtue. Truth be told, we only think of the girls, not the punishment for our actions.

'If they don't like it, so be it, and if they're angered, that's fine too. But we'll continue to harass them.'

Two of the boys answered the question in this manner: 'Women both like and dislike being tormented by us. A woman is an interesting creature, a bearer of ambiguous "yes" and "no". This is why we like them. In fact, if they didn't have this trait, we wouldn't enjoy harassing them. Yes and no are so deeply mingled in their character that often their "No!" is a "Yes". This is what gets us excited.'

One boy answered differently from the others. 'The truth is that girls love being hit on. Why should they approach their youth differently from us? They grow up in their shalwar-qameez while we grow up in our trousers and shirts. What other difference is there? I go after girls because they like it. When they're teased, they immediately share the details with their friends. This produces feelings — perhaps jealousy — in other girls. I know this and you don't but not being attached to a man produces something in them that makes them yearn. If I hadn't come to this realization, I would not be harassing them.'

Now let's turn to the answer they gave for the final question. Each boy narrated an episode where he had picked on a girl. Only a few of them are the sort that I can reproduce here. Many were of this type — "I molested this girl, she screamed, I was caught and humiliated" and so on.

The most interesting story came from the boy who had whistled at the dog. He said: 'This happened four years ago. In Amritsar, many people were being arrested over a Congress agitation. Jallianwala Bagh was festive and full of students and others. I'd slip out of home on the excuse of studying and head there. One day, when I was going through the bazaar, all of a sudden, my gaze turned up.

'I saw a head in a white turban in a balcony. For a moment I

thought it was a Sikh gent. Then the face came into view and I was amazed to see a dusky, gorgeous girl. I could see her churidar and qameez through the railings. The clothes fitted her closely.

'When she noticed me, I said to her loudly, in greeting: "*Tasleem arz karti hoon*," as if I were a girl. She was startled. She let out an embarrassed cough-smile and, under pressure from my direct and unrelenting gaze, fled into the room.

'At the students' union camp in Jallianwala Bagh, I recounted this to a few of my friends. I learnt from them that she was the wife of a Congress worker who had been arrested a few days ago. She was underground, hence the disguise. They had been married for only four or five months. And now she was alone in that house. After I heard all this, I left for my house, which wasn't too far away.

'I shut the door to my room and put on a blouse. In it I slipped two halves of a rubber ball as "breasts". I wore a petticoat and then wrapped a sari around myself. I used to wear my hair very long those days, and now I parted it at the centre, sending a few stray curls down the sides.

'I looked into the mirror and an effeminate face stared back. The wonders a few clothes can do! I slipped on my sister's burqa and left. On the street I stumbled a few times as I walked, the burqa catching the soles of my unpracticed feet. I found it difficult to get the feminine gait and stride right. The thought of being discovered also quickened my heartbeat. But I was resolute and crossed three bazaars to reach that house. Its stairs were right next to a halwai's shop. I lifted the veil from my face and climbed up, my heart racing. As I walked up, the thought of my act aced all other sentiments. I knocked, having decided that if a man answered I would not say anything but turn and leave. If needed I would explain in a thin voice: "Sorry, I came here by mistake."

'Then I knocked again. I heard footsteps. I thought of fleeing but it was too late at this point, and the latch was being unfastened. I lowered my veil. The door opened. The girl was before me. She looked distraught. Her hair was in disarray. She was wearing a different kurta, but she had on the same pyjamas I had spotted her in. On seeing that it was a burqa-clad "woman", her fear left her. I calmed down too.

'She said: "Please come in."

'We crossed a large room and went into a small one. It had two chairs and a small bed, on which was the kurta I had seen her earlier in, with one of its sleeves turned out. Next to it was that white turban.

'She asked me to sit, lifting some books off one chair and setting them on the bed. I was troubled by the main door, which she had left ajar. As I sat, she said politely: "You can take off the burqa." When I

looked around, she assured me there was nobody else in the house. “I’m alone,” she said. I had decided I wouldn’t speak but couldn’t stop the words, “Please shut that door outside,” from coming out of my mouth. I had used my *own* voice, but she didn’t react.

‘She got up to shut the door. I lifted my veil and waited. My face was still framed by the burqa’s cowl. My ears were hidden and my hair covered much of my face. So I thought this sight wouldn’t shock her too much.

‘She returned. I turned my face towards her. She was about to sit on the bed but sprang up like she was bitten. She gave off a soft shriek. As the saying in English goes, the cat was out of the bag.

‘I took the burqa off. I could see her legs were trembling. I became bolder. I smiled and said: “*Aadaab arz karti hoon*.” She recognized me and was paralyzed with fear. I looked into her eyes and said: “You look pretty in men’s clothing. What do you think of me in this outfit?”

‘She couldn’t figure out how to respond. Even if the skies had fallen and the roof caved in, she wouldn’t have been more shocked than she was now.

‘I felt for her. So I picked up the burqa and said: “Don’t be afraid. I’m leaving. The prank’s over.”

‘As I began to walk past her, she said with a trembling voice, “Wait.”

‘I stopped: “Well?”

‘She was looking at my blouse, from which the half-globes had slipped out. “Will you be able to go home like this?”

‘I said: “Why not? It’s how I came here.”

‘But even as I was saying this I knew that now, with the excitement behind me, I couldn’t take a step further in this outfit.

‘She said: “Think it over.”

‘I did. I was sure I couldn’t. I went through my options. I could take the sari off. But in just the blouse and petticoat, I would look like some sort of actor in costume. I could take it all off and wrap the sari around my waist but that was equally stupid. I reconsidered putting the burqa on again but the thought of stumbling around in it soon put paid to the idea.

‘I said: “Is it all right if I sit for a while?”

‘She said, “Sure,” but then all of a sudden she seemed to have remembered something.

“No, you must leave! My father-in-law is on his way. I’d forgotten about him. Please leave now.”

‘I now felt as if I was naked. I stubbornly settled further into the chair. She was in panic. “He’s going to be here any moment. Please, you must go now.’

‘I was furious with myself. I said sharply to her: “What do I care if he’s coming? I can’t walk another step dressed like this.”

‘Despite the tension, she laughed. I remained sullen. She thought for a moment and then pointed to the kurta on the bed which she’d worn earlier and said: “Take this. I’ll find you pyjamas. But for god’s sake, leave now. Don’t think of anything else.”

‘She didn’t wait for me to respond. She bent over and pulled out a trunk from under the bed to look for pyjamas. While she looked, I took the blouse off and put on the kurta.

‘When she couldn’t find a pair, she said: “Wait here. I’ll take mine off and give them to you,” and went out. I spent a strange couple of minutes waiting. Then she came and handed them over to me. “Please hurry,” she said and went out again.

‘I put them on with a bit of effort. She called out: “Are you done?”

‘“Yes,” I said. She came in and told me to go again: “I am scared he’ll be here!”

‘I took the burqa in my hand and was sallying forth when she said: “What about all this other stuff?” I looked at the sari, blouse, petticoat and two halves of the rubber ball. I said: “Let these remain.”

‘She didn’t respond to that. I walked towards the door. She came with me. When I opened it and was on the other side, she smiled and said: *“Aadaab arz karta hoon.”*

‘I never saw her after that. She went away somewhere the next day. I tried to look for her and asked around but nobody could tell me much.

‘Her kurta and pyjamas are still with me. Perhaps my sari, blouse and petticoat are still with her. And those two halves of the rubber ball. I cannot say if they are. But I know that this wasn’t the sort of thing that either of us will ever be able to forget.’

The boy who liked asking girls for the time said this: ‘When I moved to Bombay, I was ecstatic because I saw girls walking around everywhere, often wearing watches.

‘One day, in Nagpada’s Jewish neighbourhood, I saw a Parsi girl on the footpath. She was walking with quick strides towards Batliwala Hospital. On her slender white wrist, I could see the black strap of a watch. I was about 200 metres behind her, a distance I covered in no time.

‘I walked a couple of steps ahead of her and turned around to ask in Gujarati:*“Tamari ghadiyal ma ketla vagya*?” (What time is it in your watch?)

‘She lifted her wrist, but the watch was gone!

‘“Mari ghadiyal kyan chhe?” (Where’s my watch?) she exclaimed.

‘My Gujarati gambit was over.

‘I said in Hindustani: “*Aap ki ghadi mujhe kya maaloom kahan hai?”* (How should I know where your watch is?)

‘Man, she began shrieking. In Gujarati. And in her Parsi-

manic manner. I was terrified. I had seen it on her wrist only moments before — god knows where it had vanished.

‘She kept shouting: *“Tamej lidhi hase”* (I’m sure you took it).

‘I kept trying to reassure her that I hadn’t: “If I had, why would I have asked you for the time? And forget that, how is it even possible for me to have taken it off your wrist?”

‘By now, many Jews and Christians gathered around us on the footpath. I was surrounded. Loud voices in every possible language began to raise themselves.

‘I tried to prove my innocence — sometimes in English, other times in Hindustani. But they were all on her side, of course.

‘I was tired of protesting and was about to tell them: “Go to hell if you don’t believe me.” Just then I spotted a little child through the crowd. It was playing with a black strap. At the end of the strap was the watch.

‘I pointed with a shout: “Look! What’s that child holding?”

‘The girl turned first: “My watch!”

‘An old Jewish woman took it from the child and gave it to her. I didn’t say anything, and didn’t have to because I thought I was quite the hero of the moment.’

The boy, who said girls like being teased, told the following story: ‘As I said, girls like it and often they invite us to do it to them. I can prove it with my story.

‘This happened a couple of years ago, when my thinking on the subject was different from what it is today. I was quite unsuccessful at love then. I’d be morose all the time, out of frustration of not having had a girl.

‘One day when a friend of mine told me in vivid detail that he’d made out with a girl in this particular lane, I was even more regretful about my failure. I was so saddened about being a loser that tears came to my eyes.

‘But then I thought of going to that same lane regularly and spending time till I met the girl. There was no other girl I could think of who would allow me to do the things my friend said he had with her.

‘So for a couple of weeks, I walked through the lane at the same time every day. I often saw the girl there. And she noticed me. But I couldn’t move forward.

‘One afternoon, the lane was deserted when I entered. Near its masjid I saw a lone woman in a burqa. As I went past her, she put her

hand out and held on to my arm. She shouted: "*Kyon ve gushtian, tu har roz idhar de pheray kyon karnaiyen*?" This meant — you moron, why are you here every day?

'I began to tremble. I said: "I… I… I… never come here."

'She laughed. I could now see her glittering eyes through the burqa's mesh. It was her. My fear evaporated. I shrugged my arm off her grip and pinched her ass so viciously that she screamed "'*Allah kar key marjaein! Tera kakh na rahe*" meaning that she wished I died and that nothing remained of me.

'But everything remained, of course. She remained. My fear had left me. And her anger now left her.'

— (Originally published as *Chhed Khubaan*

Se Chali Jaye 'Asad')

* Mirza Ghalib's nom de plume, which he used in the initial days

Our Progressive Graveyards

This essay explains the working of graveyards and readers, especially non-Muslims, will find it informative. The one thing that is striking about the piece is the moral tone that Manto adopts as a preamble to the essay. He wrote this in his early years in Bombay (at the end he indicates that the incident happened in 1942). This was the time when Manto took all that he "objected" to — the clubs, the half-naked women, the drinking, the dancing and the gambling — for granted. He imagined all of this existing without the British, which was, as he was to learn later, a naive way of looking at the issue. Indeed, he was to pine for the passing of most

of it in Pakistan only a few years later, as his other

pieces show.

Many excellent things have come to us from the culture of the west. What has it not brought to us uncivilized Indians? It gave our women the sleeveless blouse. Also lipstick, rouge, powder. Hair dyes and depilation. It's a gift of civilization that a girl may now take a license to prostitute herself. She can marry under a civil act and divorce under it.

Then we have the dance halls, where one can clasp women and swing away, breast touching breast. There are the clubs where one can gamble away all of one's money. And there are places to get a drink once you've done that.

English culture has made us very progressive. Our women now wear trousers and walk about. There are also those women who seem to be wearing nothing at all, but may still walk around undisturbed.

India's become so advanced that we now talk of opening a club for nudists. How silly are those who say the British, who gave us all this, should go back to Europe. If they did, who would open a nudist club in India? Who would look after all of these other places where enjoyment may be found? Where will we dance, breast touching breast, with women? Won't our brothels become empty of life?

And who will teach us to fight one another? Who will also produce in Manchester and send us clothes made of our own cotton?

The progress we've achieved under the British, we haven't in any other era. They have brought modernity not just to our hotels, clubs and cinema halls, but also to our burial grounds.

In old-fashioned graveyards, corpses are brought and buried, as if they have no value or price. But this is not so in the new, progressive graveyards.

I came to learn this when my mother died in Bombay. Till that

time I was used to living in small towns. What did I know that the government had laws even for the dead?

My mother's corpse was in one room. I was sitting distraught on a sofa in the one next to it. A friend, who had been in Bombay for a while now, said to me: 'Look, now you people have to get working on arranging for her coffin and burial.'

I said: 'Could you please take care of it? I'm new here.'

He replied: 'I will, but first you have to send word that your mother is dead.'

'To whom?' I asked.

'The municipal office in the neighbourhood,' he said, 'till they issue a death certificate, we won't be permitted to bury her.'

The office was sent word. Soon a man arrived from there, and began asking questions. 'Was she unwell? For how long? Who was treating her?'

The truth is that she had died of a heart attack in my presence. Obviously she wasn't being treated by anyone because she hadn't been unwell before. I gave the facts to the man from the municipal office. He wasn't satisfied and said: 'You'll have to get a doctor's certificate that shows us she died of a heart attack.'

I had no idea from where or how to get one and said a few words in anger to him in my frustration. My friend, the one who had been in Bombay for some time, now rose and took the man aside. He exchanged a few words with him, and then turned to me, saying to him: 'He's a moron. He doesn't understand how things work here.' He came over and took two rupees from my pocket and gave it to the man from the municipal office, who suddenly became friendly. He said: 'Give me a few empty medicine bottles so that there's proof of her illness. Also hand me any old prescriptions that you may have.'

I felt as if I were my mother's killer and this fellow, who knew of my guilt, was helping out of pity for me, showing me the ways in which to hide the murder. I thought of shoving him out and throwing the empty bottles one by one on his retreating head. But, and thanks here to civilization and culture, I was silent and asked for some empty bottles to be brought and gave them to him.

For a two-rupee bribe, I had secured the municipality's permission. Now the graveyard awaited. The first sight of it was a large metal door with a tiny room on one side, like the booking office of a cinema hall. A man peeked out from its window as my mother's corpse was being led inside. He was about to say something when my friend handed him the certificate.

The manager was satisfied, the body hadn't entered without a ticket. It was a pretty graveyard. There was a grove of trees at one end, in the shade of which many gravestones could be seen. There

were rose bushes and *chameli* growing all around the area. On asking, we learnt that this was the highest class in the graveyard, where the rich buried their dead. To spend an eternity here, it costs 300 rupees. This sum bought you or your loved ones a good location and a well constructed grave. For it to be cared for, an additional six rupees had to be paid every year.

The graves other than the 300-rupee ones would be dug up every three or four years. Others would then be buried in that space. These graves neither had the shade of tree nor any fragrance of rose and *chameli*. Along with dirt, a special masala was added to these graves so that the flesh would decompose and the bones dissolved rapidly.

Because there were rows upon rows of them, these ordinary, unmarked graves had numbers identifying some of them. The number could be bought for four annas. This is also like it is in a cinema hall, where you pay for a numbered seat. Once the money was paid, a metal plate stamped with the number was assigned to the grave. This plate remained till the grave was emptied for its next occupant.

Numbering makes it all so easy. In your diary, you can set down all your details with numbers:

Shoe size: 5
Stocking size: 91/2
Insurance policy number: 225689
Mother's grave number: 4817
Telephone number: 44457

And if the world really progresses, you'll be allotted the number of your grave the moment you're born.

Anyway, in the graveyard there was a beautiful little mosque. On the board outside was written: 'Important Message' and under it the following instructions.

'If someone wants to bury their relative in a kutcha grave, they must dig it themselves. Nobody is available to do this.

Digging a large one will cost two rupees and four annas. Of this one rupee and four annas is for the gravedigger and one rupee for the rights of the graveyard. A small grave (for children) will cost one rupee and four annas of which twelve annas are for the gravedigger and eight annas for the graveyard. If this is not paid, the grave will be vacated. Nobody is permitted to stay on in the graveyard, whether man or woman. You may come with the bier and leave when it is done. If a body is brought in without ritual cleaning, the graveyard will take four annas for the washing (even if this is done by your person).

For bodies that are brought in the night, another two annas for lights will be charged. Please do not shout or scream or fight here. Those who do will be handed over to the police. If gravediggers are

used for watering graves or the plants around them, they are to be paid another four annas. Those who do not pay this will not have their graves or plants watered.

Management Trustee.

This has a point of similarity with the notices in cinema halls. Even there it's written: 'Those who come drunk or make trouble will be handed over to the police.'

It's quite possible that as we progress, there will be additions to the notice in the graveyard. Such as: 'In case of a natural disaster or aerial bombing, management will not refund the money for those graves that may be destroyed. For building an air-raid shelter over your grave, the price is two hundred and fifty rupees. But even here, note that the responsibility for the grave's safety does not lie with the management. To keep graves air-conditioned, small cooling plants are available. The bill must be settled for this month etc.'

Another board was put up in the graveyard where the rates for ritual cleaning were advertised:

For funeral prayer and Quran reading: six annas

Cleaning an adult: One rupee and two annas

Cleaning a child: fourteen annas

Wood for heating water: four annas

Labour for heating and filling water: two annas

*Barga** for adults: two-and-a-half annas

Barga for children: one-and-three-fourth annas

I found this board to be like those in good saloons. Perhaps there could be one in the graveyard for the grooming of corpses as well. Something like:

Haircut (Boys): four annas

Haircut (Women): one rupee

Haircut (Girls): eight annas

Shave: two annas

Haircut and shave: nine annas

Shampoo: two annas

Haircut, shave and shampoo: ten annas.

If one gets a haircut, shampoo and shave, a couple of annas may be saved. Perhaps the graveyards will also give such discounts to their customers. In a notice such as: 'Those who pay for two large graves in a year, a child's grave will be free.' Or: 'Those who have two graves dug at the same time will get two rose bushes free.'

Or: 'Those who buy the gravestones etc from our store will get one beautiful metal number free.'

I wonder when we progress even further, if an advance booking of graves will be possible? We can select a spot in some fashionable place a few years before our loved ones are likely to go so that we

don’t have to face last-minute disappointments.

And the manner of burial will also be the latest, I suppose. It will in fact even be advertised.‘Isaji Moosaji & Sons — Experts in laying you to rest. We are specialists in ritual cleaning and clothing without any contact with human hands.’

Graveyards will also advertise their services: ‘City’s most modern graveyard! Where your loved ones will rest in as much peace as you have in your bedroom!’

There are many anjuman-type bodies in Bombay that do this sort of thing anyway, and arrange for burial. You need not do a thing. Just send word to one of them. From cleaning the corpse to clothing it and taking it to the graveyard, it’s all door-to-door service.They’ll hand you a bill at the end of it, of course.

And you’re a busy man, so why not? Let’s say your servant dies. You regret the death very much and are in fact deeply saddened by his passing. But it is also a fact that some acquaintances of yours are off to a picnic on the beach. And these are people with whom you may have some business dealings. So you summon someone from one of the anjumans. You settle their fees and it’s done.

Their young men will shoulder the bier and piously shout out verses from the Quran as they lead the body out. The funeral prayer will be held in a proper fashion (it is listed in your bill).

And in the adult grave, which costs two rupees and four annas, your faithful servant will be interred. Meanwhile you’re enjoying your picnic, and things are also being done quite smoothly here. If you’ve promised them a bonus, the anjuman’s boys will even offer a sheet of flowers over the grave.

A few days after my mother was buried, I had occasion to visit that graveyard again. The board had this new notice on it: ‘From June 1942, the labour charge of gravediggers has been increased. For digging an adult grave, one rupee and four annas. For digging a small grave, 14 annas.’

War has brought inflation even to the graveyard.

— (Originally published as *Taraqqi Yafta Qabrastan*)

* a wooden lattice placed above a body to separate it from the mud

Save India from its Leaders

This was Manto's "Anna Hazare" moment. His shriek of protest against politicians he thought were bringing the nation to ruin. His faith in the people was as strong as that displayed by the protestors led by Hazare in 2012 and his solution was also similar to that of middle-class Indians today — a strong man capable of reining in the State. This piece was evidently written before Independence. Although no context is provided, as best I could make out, the piece was aimed at M A Jinnah and the Muslim League.

We've been hearing this for some time now — Save India from this, save it from that. The fact is that India needs to be saved from the people who say it should be saved.

They're experts in making up this sort of thing, there's no doubt. The last thing they are, however, is sincere.

After an evening of fiery speeches and righteous denunciation, when they return to their luxuriant bedrooms, their brains are empty of all thoughts of saving us.

They waste not a second on what actually ails India. Their concerns are personal, not national, and so occupied are they with this that there's actually no space for us.

These people, who can't even run their homes efficiently, and whose character is lowly, want to straighten out the country and lecture us on what is right.

It would be funny if it weren't so ridiculous.

These people — "leaders" — see religion and politics as some lame, crippled man. They peddle him around to beg for money. They shoulder his corpse and appeal to those who will believe anything said from high on up. They claim they are bringing the corpse back to life with their effort.

But the fact is that religion is what it used to be and will forever remain that. The principle of religion is intact, solid. It is unalterable, the sort of mountain that waves can never erode.

When these leaders shed tears and wail, "*Mazhab khatre mein hai"* (Religion is in danger), it is all rubbish. Faith isn't the sort of thing that can come into danger in the first place. If anything is in danger, it's these leaders who want to be saved by claiming religion is in peril.

Save India from its leaders, who are poisoning our atmosphere. You may not know this but these leaders go around with scissors. With these they snip your pocket and take all your money. Their life is a long run — towards wealth. Every time they exhale, you can smell the odour of insincerity and greed.

At the head of enormous processions, weighed down by fat

garlands, delivering unending speeches full of empty words, they make a path to power for themselves. A path to luxury. They raise and make huge sums of money for themselves as you have seen, but have they told you how unemployment will end? They scream “religion” all the time but when did they last follow the teachings of their faith?

These fellows — who live in houses given to them, who live on the money they raise from others — how can they make us self-sufficient?

India doesn’t need many leaders, each singing a different tune from the other, but those who sing together using the same words. We need only one, as wise as the Caliph Umar and as brave as Ataturk. Someone who will rein in the runaway horse of the State. Who will lead us manfully towards Independence.

Remember — the greedy will never be able to lead us in the right way. Those dressed in silk have nothing to offer those who sleep on stones. Fling such people aside.

They are bed bugs who creep inside the crevices and emerge only to suck our blood.They should be forced out with the heat of our despise.

They rant against the rich for no reason other than that they want to be rich themselves. They are the worst sort of people imaginable. They are the thieves among thieves. Let them know what you think of them.

What’s needed is for our young men, who may be clothed in tatters but are strong and broad-chested, to stand up and toss them aside from the pedestals they’ve occupied without our permission.

They have no right to claim empathy with us, the poor. And remember — there’s no shame in poverty. Those who think there is are themselves shameful.

The man who fends for himself is the superior of the man who lives off the work of others. Be the man who fends for himself. Look coldly at what is in your best interest. Once we take our fate into our hands, these leaders will have nowhere to run.

— (Originally published as *Hindustan Ko*

Leaderon Se Bachao)

The Guilty Men of Bombay

To my mind, Manto was Bombay's finest chronicler, better than the next best writer about the city, Behram Contractor. Manto wrote what it felt and meant to be part of a great, modern city. Contractor, famous under the name "Busybee", wrote merely of experiences. In this piece, Manto attacks the rioting that broke out in Bombay after the Muslim League's Direct Action Day and blames one man, Hafiz Ali Bahadur Khan. Manto hated religious division and didn't think much of the Muslim League. This piece is raw, and though not particularly penetrative or insightful, it shows his sentiment towards a problem that Indians still live with. It is remarkable how aptly we can apply the situation that Manto describes to the present time. Manto first fled Amritsar's religious violence, and then, a short time after writing this piece, fled from Bombay at Partition.*

(I escaped the filthy lanes and bazaars of Amritsar to land in Bombay. I thought that in this beautiful and broad-minded place, I would be rid of the communal squabbling I had found in Amritsar. I was wrong.

A few months after my coming, Hindus and Muslims began fighting, and kept fighting.

The cause was the same as it always is — mandir, masjid… you know it well. Many human beings were sacrificed for this. I saw much of this savagery myself but kept my feelings and anguish within.

Then I picked up my pen. I wrote this appeal to the lovely people of Bombay. This resulted in our honourable Muslims coming to sort me out. How I escaped a thrashing at their hands, now that's another story.)

In the end, what was feared, happened. The gathering at the sabha mandap produced vitriol and the air over Bombay soured.

And then our eyes were forced to see such horrific, in fact demonic visions…

Knives were thrust, stones flung, masculine skill with rods displayed. Homes and neighbourhoods were raided. Soon the streets and corners of my Bombay were spattered with blood.

India was taken, when it was at the point of Independence, and dragged into this dark and enormous pit.

Those who value freedom and are aware of the happenings and the history of this age know that this fighting over religion is destructive as few things can be. Their depression at this cusp of freedom is understandable.

No man wishes to see blood and other men slaughtered, save those who deliberately nurture the most base and terrifyingly cruel

sentiment.

Which man delights in seeing red streams flow out of the neck of his brother, across which he has just drawn a blade? Who could possibly wish to dance on the mounds of the dead?

Then why is it that the skies over Bombay witnessed this continued massacre? We must force ourselves to examine the events if we are to resolve the question: who was responsible for these killings?

The world is filled with good people. But it also contains some whose time is spent in sharpening their swords and daggers. They await the opportunities to distribute these blades so that from the carnage thus spread, they might profit.

These are people who want to take India to a state of barbarism. They want to spread insecurity through fear and carnage, so that their interests remain secure. They are happy to see in markets the sale of human flesh as meat.

They don't want India to be independent. They are traitors, and their time is spent in betraying not just their nation, but humanity. They aspirate the fires of hell from their very breath.

They are our leaders. Our representatives.

They are like a cat's claws. Soft and furry if seen from the top. Sharp and vicious if seen from below. If you heard them speak, it would sound like they feel the world's pain in their breast. But this pretense is not hidden for long.

Their compassion, their religiosity, their humanity is all a sham. It is frightening to consider that we share this planet with such wickedness.

The violence in Bombay could have been prevented. Over the bitterness, the sourness that Hindus and Muslims feel for one another, the balm of words could have been applied. A little patience and restraint should have been preached.

Had they not succumbed to the mob's passion and applied cold reason to problems, peace would not have been difficult to find.

A few men did make such attempts, but unfortunately the hissing of some snakes — I am referring to Hafiz Ali Bahadur Khan — ruined what could have been an end to this needless violence.

Those leaders who used religion to rouse hatred, and whom I hold responsible, should know that there are many in India who understand what they are doing. They should know that they are viewed with disgust and contempt.

The palace of independent India cannot be built by those who play mischief with religious propaganda. They are not only enemies of our independence but of the human race.

They must be named and shamed.

Else their every action will continue for long to throttle the neck

of this nation's youth, soon to be independent.

— (Originally published as *Ek Ashk Aalood Appeal*)

* Hafiz Ali Bahadur Khan was a leader of the Ahrar movement and a member of the Municipal Corporation, Bombay

Bombay in the Riots

Manto was probably the best observer of communal violence in Bombay. It is remarkable that his writing of this period has not been translated till now, seventy years after it was written. In this piece, he writes of the mayhem that visited the city during the Quit India movement. The thing about Manto is, as we shall see in this essay, that he is essentially detached from his material. Not in the sense that he doesn't care about what's going on — in fact he's terrified, confused, angered and appalled by it. But in the sense that he doesn't bring his religious identity, in so far as he has one, to his writing. That makes him unusual and interesting.

I returned to Bombay hoping to spend some time with friends and give my battered mind some rest.

Instead, on reaching here, I was so jolted that far from rest and recreation, I even lost what little sleep I had.

Now, I've never had any interest in politics. I put politicians in the same bracket as I do soothsayers. I'm exactly as much interested in politics, as Gandhiji is

in cinema.

Gandhiji doesn't watch movies, and I don't read newspapers. Both of us are wrong in doing so. Gandhiji would do well to be acquainted with our movies, and I should certainly be reading the papers.

Anyway, I reached Bombay. The same streets whose cobbled stones I had worn down with my walking for five years. The same Bombay where I'd seen two riots unfold. It was the same beautiful city in which I had seen the blood of not a few innocent Muslims and Hindus spattered.

The very place where Congress had now passed a law on prohibition, banning all alcohol. In doing this, they had removed from employment thousands who tapped toddy and brewed liquor.

It was the same Bombay whose dhobis I had seen standing twelve hours in water, toiling away, and were now drinking a vile and poisonous spirit to relieve their pain.

The city where in the canyons between magnificent skyscrapers, thousands slept on the footpath.

I've seen, as I said, two riots in this city. The reasons were the same — mandir and masjid, cow and pig.

Mandir and masjid — to me only stone.

Cow and pig — to me only flesh.

This time, in Bombay, I saw new things. Not the usual riot between Hindus and Muslims, not a fight over temple and mosque, not fury over cow and pig.

An entirely new sort of chaos and a new storm raging through this new Bombay.

One day I got a phone call informing me that the entire Congress leadership had been jailed, including Gandhiji who wasn't even in the Congress.

I said: 'That's fine, these people keep getting into and out of jail all the time.' The news didn't surprise me. But then immediately after, another friend phoned me to say that Bombay was incensed by the news. The police had lathi-charged the mobs, even fired at them. The army had been called in and apparently there were even tanks on the streets.

I couldn't leave home for three days. And so I began reading the newspapers and heard terrifying stories from people.

The Muslim League is a mosque. The Congress is a temple. This is what I gathered from the papers. The Congress seeks Independence and so does the Muslim League, but their paths aren't the same. For some reason, they can't work together. Perhaps this is because a mosque and a temple cannot be in the same place.

I thought that the Hindus and Muslims would busy themselves in this war and their blood, which did not mix in mosque and temple, would finally mingle in Bombay's drains and gutters. I was surprised to learn that even this thought was totally wrong. The city was divided.

There's a long road that leads to Mahim. At the end of the road is a famous Muslim shrine. When the rioting began and reached this part of the city, the youngsters uprooted trees from the road and carried them into the bazaar as barricades.

Then something interesting happened. Some Hindu boys were dragging a big piece of metal on the road towards the shrine. A few Muslims walked towards them. One said politely to the Hindus: '*Dekho, bhai* (look, brother), this is where Pakistan begins.' A line was drawn on the road.

So those boys, intent on rioting, quietly took their pole and carried it over to the other side. It was said that after this, no "kafir" dared to come into "Pakistan".

Bhendi Bazaar is Bombay's Muslim heart. There was no rioting here this time. Its Muslims — who earlier took the lead in violence against Hindus — now sat in hotels sipping cups of tea and sighing.

I heard a Muslim tell my friend: 'We're only waiting for Jinnah saheb's order.'

Listen to another story from this same riot.

An Englishman was passing in his car. A mob stopped him. He was terrified, unsure of what terrible fate awaited him. He was surprised when one of the young men said to him: 'Let your chauffeur

sit in the back now and you drive him. You be the servant and him your master.'

The Englishman immediately took the wheel and the driver sheepishly sat in the back. The Englishman felt relief at being let off so easily. The rioters were absolutely delighted at their triumph.

In another place, the editor of one of Bombay's Urdu film magazines was walking down the road. He was out on work to collect advertising dues and so had worn his suit.

He had knotted a tie and also had a hat on. The rioters stopped him.

'Hand over the hat and tie,' they demanded. Frightened out of his wits, the editor handed them over. The mob tossed the offending articles into a fire.

Then a young man said: 'What about the suit? Even that's a sign of a colonialist.' The editor now threw himself at their mercy.

'I only have this one suit. It's what I have to wear to the offices of film companies and recover advertising dues from their owners,' he said, 'if you burn it, I'll be ruined and lose my earnings.'

When the rioters saw his tears, they let him off with his suit intact.

The place where I live has mainly Christian homes. Christians of every shade — dark, wheatish and white. They consider themselves a part of the colonial race, the English. That's why these riots affected the Christians badly. Their legs, dressed in trousers and skirts, trembled.

When news came of the violence getting closer, the men stopped wearing their hats. The women stopped wearing skirts and dresses and now wore saris instead.

In earlier riots, when we left home we would carry two caps. A Hindu topi and a Rumi topi. When passing through a Muslim mohalla, we would put on the Rumi topi and when walking through a Hindu mohalla, the Hindu topi. In this riot, we also bought Gandhi topis. These we kept in our pockets to be pulled out wherever needed. Religion used to be felt in the heart, but now, in the new Bombay, it must be worn on the head.

— (Originally published as *Batein,* in

Manto Ke Mazameen, 1954)

Bombay During Partition

We are fortunate that Manto brought his skills as a writer and observer to the days of Partition in Bombay. So little is known about the atmosphere and the happenings during those crucial days, obscured by the jubilation of Independence from the British. There is some material in the autobiography of the judge, M C Chagla and in the writings of Rafiq Zakaria. However, Manto brings an immediacy which makes those days come alive. Indians cannot imagine how divided their cities were during that period, and this essay will take them by surprise. Manto then tells us, through his experiences in Pakistan, how silly the whole enterprise was.

When India was partitioned, I was in Bombay. On the radio I heard speeches made by Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah and Pandit Nehru. And I saw the chaos that came to the city.

Before this, I had read news about Hindu-Muslim violence in the papers daily. Some days five Hindus would be cut down, other days five Muslims. In any case, it seemed to me that equal blood was drawn and shed by both sides.

But now, at Partition, it was different.

Let me tell you how, through this story.

The newspaper man would throw the *Times of India* through the kitchen window every morning. One day, it was just after a riot, the newspaper man knocked on the door.

I was alarmed. I walked out and saw a stranger holding out the paper.

I asked him: 'Where's that man who delivers the paper daily?'

'He's dead, sir,' the stranger replied, 'he was stabbed in Kamathipura yesterday. Before he died, he gave me a list of people to deliver the paper to and collect the money from them.'

I can't express what I felt on hearing this, so I won't try to.

The next day I was at Claire Road, near my house, when I saw a body near the petrol pump. It was the corpse of an ice-seller, a Hindu, whose cart was next to him. The ice was melting. The drops mingled with the blood that had coagulated around him. It looked like jelly.

Those were strange days. There was chaos, mayhem, panic everywhere and from the womb of this anarchy were born two nations. Independent India and independent Pakistan.

Many wealthy Muslims in Bombay took a flight out to Karachi, hoping to see the celebrations of the founding of an Islamic republic.

The rest cowered in fear, only hoping that nothing terrible would happen to them. The 14th of August arrived.

Bombay, always beautiful, now looked as gorgeous as a bride. It was glittering with lights, so many that I think the city had never

spent so much on power as it did that night.

The Bombay Electric Supply and Tramway Company, called BEST, had decorated one of their tram cars for the festivities, covering it entirely in lights so that it resembled the Tricolour of the Congress. It roamed the city roads the whole night.

Many buildings were also lit-up, especially the shops owned by the British, like Whiteways and Ewan Frieze's.

Now listen to what was going on in Bhendi Bazaar. This is a famous market area dominated by what are called in Bombay's language, Miya Bhais — Muslims.

It has countless hotels and restaurants, some called "Bismillah" and others called "Subhanallah". The entire Quran is to be found in the names of this place. Bhendi Bazaar is Bombay's Pakistan. Here, Hindus were celebrating the freedom of their Hindustan and Muslims of their Pakistan.

I of course had no idea what to make of any of this.

The few Hindu shops in Bhendi Bazaar displayed the Tricolour. Everywhere else, Islamic flags of the Muslim League were visible. When I went there in the morning, I noticed something bizarre. The bazaar was covered in green flags. There was a painting of Jinnah (made by an amateur) which was put up in a restaurant. I cannot get these sights out of my mind.

The Muslims were ecstatic that they had got their Pakistan. But where was this Pakistan? Not in Bhendi Bazaar. And what was this Pakistan, if not India? This they did not know.

They were happy, perhaps for no reason other than they finally had a reason to be happy about.

At the Rampur Dada restaurant, many cups of tea and Passing Soap cigarettes were consumed amid delight at the creation of Pakistan.

As I said, I had no idea what to make of it, but the strange thing is that on 14 August, nobody was killed in Bombay. People were busy celebrating their freedom.

What this freedom was, how it had been achieved and what it would mean to their lives — not much thought was spent on it. There was only shouting. "Pakistan zindabad!" on one side, "Hindustan zindabad!" on the other.

And now listen to something about our new Islamic republic.

On last year's independence day, a man was cutting down a tree in front of our house. I said to him: 'What are you doing? You've no right to cut this tree.'

He replied: 'This is Pakistan. It belongs to us.'

I had no reply to this.

Once upon a time, before Partition, our neighbourhood was very

pretty. Now the park in it is dry and in which naked children play vile games and scream abuse. A large ball belonging to one of my daughters was lost. I thought it must be somewhere in the house, and forgot about it. Four days later, I saw some boys playing with it. When I confronted them, they said: 'It's ours. We paid one rupee and four annas for it.'

It had cost me four rupees and fifteen annas. But apparently it's "finders-keepers" in Pakistan, so I left my little girl's ball with them for they had a right to it.

Another story about the neighbourhood. A man was removing the bricks from the path to our house. I went out and said: 'Why are you doing this to us?' He replied: 'This is Pakistan — who are you to stop me?' I had no reply to this either.

I had sent a radio for repairs and forgotten. When I remembered a month later, I went to pick it up. The man said: 'I waited for you, and then I sold it to recover the cost of repairs.'

And recently, I got a notice from the government. 'You're an unwanted person,' it read, 'vacate the house that has been allotted to you as refugee property or tell us why we shouldn't evict you from it.'

If I am now declared an "unwanted person", the government perhaps also reserves the right to declare me a rat and exterminate me. Anyway, for now I'm safe here in Pakistan.

In the end I want to tell you this important story.

When I left Bombay at Partition, I first came to Karachi. Things were so nasty here that I immediately decided to flee to Lahore. I went to the railway station and asked for a first class ticket to Lahore.

The booking clerk said: 'All the seats are booked, there's no ticket for you.'

Now I was used to the environment of Bombay, where everything is available for a price. So I said 'Look, why don't you take something and give it to me.'

He stopped his work and looked at me. He said in a stern voice: 'This is Pakistan. I would have done such a thing before, but now I cannot. All the seats are booked. You can't get a ticket at any price.'

And I didn't.

— (Originally published as *Yom-e-Istiqlal* in *Oopar,*

Neechay aur Darmiyan, 1954)

A Stroll Through the New Pakistan

What happens when the city you're familiar with suddenly becomes a new country? Manto tells us by taking a walk through the lanes of Lahore, a city that was once in India and later became something else.

It was a strange season and a strange morning.

The thought kept coming to me: "Get out of the house. Go to the garden." So I left.

On the way, I walked through bazaars and the neighbourhood. I had already seen most of these before, but yesterday for the first time saw what they had become after Pakistan became "Zindabad".

"Pakistan Zindabad — Mohajir Haircutting Saloon"; "Pakistan Zindabad — We Fix Locks"; "Pakistan Zindabad — Garam Chai Stall"; "Pakistan Zindabad — Hospital for Sick Pets"; "Pakistan Zindabad — This shop has been allotted to Syed Anwer Husain Mohajir from Jalandhar". And so on.

Outside a building I even saw this: "Pakistan Zindabad — This property belongs to a Parsi". Meaning don't allot it by mistake thinking it to be a Hindu's.

It was a strange season and a strange morning. Almost all the shops were shut. A halwai was open. I thought a glass of lassi would be refreshing. In the shop I noticed that the fan was on, but turned away from both customers and the owner.

I was curious and asked why it was so. The owner glared at me and said: 'Can't you see?'

I looked. The fan was pointed in the direction of a poster of our great leader, Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

I shouted, 'Pakistan Zindabad!' and left without the lassi.

In front of a shop, a man sat frying pooris. I thought I had bought chappals from the same shop just a couple of days ago. Where did that go? It was the same board, and in front was the same building gutted in the riots, in whose balcony hung a fan. I wondered if it had fanned the flames.

'What are you thinking about?' the pooriwala said from behind me, 'They're fresh and hot!'

I said: 'I'm thinking — wasn't there a shoe shop where you're sitting?'

He wiped the sweat off his brow and smiled. 'It's still here. It opens at 9. I open at 6 and am done by 8:30.'

I moved on. I saw a man bent over some shards of glass on the road. At first I thought he was a good man, picking out larger pieces which he worried would trouble pedestrians.

But it then became clear that he was actually scattering them

around thoughtfully here and there. I stood at a distance to figure out why.

Once he was done, he walked to the side of the road under a board that read: “Cycle puncture and repair shop”. I walked faster. There was one nice change to the boards of the shops. Earlier almost all used to be in English. Now their names and descriptions were in Urdu. Some had Arabic names and some were in Persian. When in Rome, as they say…. One shoe shop was called Paposhiana, probably meaning an *ashiana* (nest) for shoes.

I was pleased. I shouted, ‘Pakistan Zindabad!’ and moved on.

Next I saw a strange cart erected on four cycle wheels. I asked what it was. ‘Hotel,’ I was informed. A travelling hotel. There was a stove and pan for chapattis, four gravy dishes were ready, a pan to fry shami kababs, two pots of water, ice, bottles of lemonade, a pot of curds, glasses, plates. All of it. Amazing.

A little ahead, a man was slapping a boy around. On asking why, I was told the child was a servant who had lost a one-rupee note.

I confronted the man: ‘What’s the matter with you? He’s only a child. A one-rupee note is really a scrap of paper. He must have dropped it somewhere. Don’t you dare hit him for it.’

The man didn’t back down. ‘It may be a scrap of paper for you. Do you know how much effort is put in to earn one of those?’ Saying this, he once again began to thrash the boy.

I couldn’t stand it any longer. I fished out a rupee from my pocket and gave it to the man.

I walked on. A few paces later, a fellow put his hand on my shoulder. He was smiling. ‘You gave a rupee to that bastard, didn’t you?’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘he was hitting the poor child.’

‘The poor child is his son,’ the man said.

‘What?’

‘They collect a few rupees this way every day.’

‘Fine,’ I said and walked on.

Ahead, there was chaos. Some boys with bundles of paper were shouting and running about. I heard many accents and languages. They were selling newspapers and shouting out the latest headlines. A shoe had been flung in Delhi; dogs had attacked a leader’s house in Lucknow; Kashmir would be liberated in two weeks.

There were many papers. There was *Nawa-e-Subah*, there was *Abu-al-Waqt*, and *Sunehra Pakistan.*

I noticed a woman there. She was about fifty and serious-faced. She had a cloth bag in one hand and a bundle of newspapers in the other.

‘Are you selling those?’ I asked.

'Yes.'

I bought two and moved on, thinking about her.

A pack of dogs began running towards me. Snarling, sniping, loving and biting each other at the same time. I stood to the side, frozen in fear. Only a couple of weeks ago I had been bitten and injected fourteen times in my stomach with 10 cc shots. I wondered if the dogs were refugees from the other side or had been left behind when their masters went over. Whatever it was, I felt, they should be cared for. Those belonging to refugees should be rehabilitated. Those who were master-less should be allotted to Pakistanis who had left their dogs behind. The pack then moved on and I calmed down.

I began to walk again, opening one of the newspapers. There was a large photograph of an actress inside, printed in three colours. She was wearing little. The caption read: "See how obscene the movies have become". I said 'Pakistan Zindabad' in my head and tossed the paper onto the street. In the second paper, I spotted this little classified, "Yesterday, I left my cycle outside Lloyd's Bank. On returning, I found my new saddle replaced by a broken, old one. I'm a poor refugee. Whoever took it, please return my saddle."

I laughed out aloud. I folded the paper and put it in my pocket.

A little ahead was a shop burnt in the riots. A man now sat inside with two large slabs of ice on the floor. A thought came to me: 'At last the poor shop has the chance to cool itself.'

Now some cycles were passing by. On one a man was riding with a burqa-clad woman on the carrier behind. A couple of minutes later, a similar couple went by but this time the burqa-wearing woman was sitting in front, on the handle.

Their cycle went over the skin of a watermelon and began to slip. The man braked. The slipping/stopping motion was too much and they tumbled.

I ran to help. The man was wrapped in the burqa and the poor woman was under the cycle. I lifted it and helped her up. The man disentangled himself from the burqa and said to me: 'You stay away. We don't need your help.'

He wrapped the burqa back haphazardly over the woman and sat her on the handle again. They left. I prayed there wasn't another watermelon skin ahead.

I walked on. There was a sign on the wall that caught my eye. It was relevant. The headline said: "Muslim women and purdah".

A little ahead I came to a familiar chowk, but the statue I had known was missing. I asked a man where it had gone.

'It went,' he said.

'On its own?' I asked.

He laughed: 'No, they took it.'

‘Who?’

‘Those who owned it.’

I thought to myself, even statues were now refugees. There might come a day when corpses would also be dug up and moved across the border.

I was about to leave when a man, out for a stroll like me, said: ‘It hasn’t gone anywhere. It’s still here. And safe.’

‘Where?’ I asked.

‘In the museum.’

I prayed — ‘God, please don’t let me be around when they put people in the museum too because they are different.’

I moved on.

A refugee from Delhi and his little boy were walking on the footpath just ahead of me. The kid said, ‘Dad, let’s eat *choley* today.’

The father said sternly: ‘Not *choley*, it’s *chaney*.’

The kid said: ‘No dad, *chaney* is what we get in Delhi. Here they eat *choley*.’

Dad calmed down.

I had now reached Lawrence Bagh, my destination. It was the same place but lacked the usual bustle. There were no women around and I wondered why. The sound of blaring songs jolted me out of my thoughts and I realized where they were. Some walking around the path like corpses. And others probably being entertained in the zoo by something other than flowers and plants and the joys of nature. This depressed me.

Anway, as I was leaving, a man stopped me. ‘Is this Bagh-e-Jinnah?’

‘No,’ I said, ‘this is Lawrence Bagh.’

He laughed. ‘It was renamed Bagh-e-Jinnah after Partition.’

‘Pakistan Zindabad!’ I said to him.

He laughed louder and went into the park. I felt I was just coming out of hell.

— (Originally published as *Savere Jo Kal*

Aankh Meri Khuli)

Iqbal Day

Allama Iqbal died in 1938, a decade before Partition, but he is seen as a Pakistani poet. Iqbal was the writer of the poem, Tarana-e-Hindi, commonly known as Saare jahan se achcha, and was also one of the ideologues of a separate state for Muslims. He is today celebrated in Pakistan, though mainly as an icon, and more or less forgotten in India. Manto found himself in the surprising position of having to preside over the annual Iqbal Day in independent Pakistan. Surprising because he had no love for the Islamic State and, as he says here, he was not very keen on poetry. But the one thing he had in common with the man he was eulogizing was that both were persecuted. Iqbal for his heresies (he wrote a complaint against god, a great poem called Shikwa) and Manto because he rejected conventionalism of every sort. Both men, and this is also common to them, became heroes many years after their death. Iqbal for those who loved Pakistan and Manto for those who hated it.

Ladies and gentlemen and my fellow writers. For the honour of presiding over this, the first Iqbal Day, I want to thank you formally. However, seeing myself in this presiding chair, something else also comes to mind. I'm puzzled. Only till the other day, I was being abused and humiliated for my work and today. .

But then again, what happened with Allama Iqbal? In his time he was also abused and had to face the charge of being a heretic. On remembering this, my own bewilderment somewhat eased but then something puzzling occurred to me about my being here. I have as much association with the knowledge of poetry as Mahatma Gandhi had with cinema.

Anyway, I should make use of the opportunity that you civilized people have given me and so here goes.

I first became acquainted with Iqbal's poetry through the bill of a bar I was drinking in. This was about fifteen years ago, when I was depressed with life as I tended to be in those days, and in fact tired of it. One night I was settling the account after having a couple of drinks when I spotted this line on the bill: "Life must be lived with danger."

It was the timely advice of a fellow drinker perhaps, or the wisdom of the bartender. I must say that today it is different. Even if life itself were to tire of me, I would never be depressed by it. I could wager the most expensive thing on the most dangerous gamble and then square it off for no money at all. That line of Iqbal's on the bill I agree with.

I became more familiar with his poetry in this same period. A friend gave me a copy of his book, *Bal e Jibreel* (Gabriel's Wing) and pointed me to the couplet carrying an instruction from god. We read it

together and it went:

Arise and wake the poor of my world
End tyranny and bring in the revolution!

In those days Iqbal was thought of as a Bolshevik and an agent of Russia. Today, in this independent Islamic state, the people who repeat this order from god are called Communists. They are tried under laws that prohibit their saying these words. It's a miracle that Iqbal's verse has escaped this justice.

The other day brought news that some refugee farmers in Punjab had set fire to a large store of grain. This was after their landlords had stolen the grain from the fields overnight and filled up their silos. It struck me when I read this that it wasn't necessary for the artist's message to reach the audience only through books, paintings and songs. When a true artist plucks a string, its vibrations remain for centuries and fill the atmosphere with his message. It reaches out and touches those it was meant for. How else did those illiterate farmers know of this couplet written years ago in Gabriel's Wing?

The field that cannot feed even its tiller
Burn down every stalk that stands on it.

I'm not qualified to write about Iqbal's philosophy and don't want to say anything else. Yes, I have two disappointments which I find necessary to recount. The first one came when a poet of Iqbal's caliber had to lavish praise on a false prophet. The other one I feel now. Iqbal wrote of the sky and land, the air and sea, of valley and mountain, of star and sun and moon — of all creation — as the inheritance of man. Today even his work is the preserve of a few self-appointed custodians. In our culture, it is common to find custodians of the graveyard. But Iqbal's verse is alive, not dead. This squatting on his work is, if nothing else, against our traditions.

Iqbal had asked to be granted this wish: "Make my vision common." This wish, from a pained heart, is sure to come true. But after witnessing it on soap packets, oil tins, hotel bills and laundry lists, it seems to me that though his words have been made common, his vision will take more time. As he himself said:

A diamond may be cut by a flower's petal but
The naive man isn't affected by the wise word.

— (Originally published as *Yom-e-Iqbal*)

A Question is Produced

Manto wrote this piece a few months after Partition. We know this because he refers to Gandhi as having passed away and Jinnah (who died only seven months later in September 1948) as still alive. His fondness for Gandhi, something he felt till the end, and his dislike for Jinnah, is apparent here. It is a slightly surreal piece for those who are unfamiliar with why Manto wrote on the subject of questions. The fact is, the ideological State suppressed the individual by denying him the freedom of speech. Manto took this aspect of Pakistan head on. Something was lost while translating this piece, which uses a recurring pun on the word "paida" (born), but I've given it a go anyway.

Respectable ladies and gentlemen (and also less-respectable women and men), your attention please!

You are hereby notified that another question has come up. In fact, from the time of Adam till this day, as many questions have been conceived as there are stars in the night sky. But even so, they keep producing themselves.

What I mean to say is that nobody stands up, or indeed sits down, to say that no more questions should be allowed to be produced.

Allah sends down natural disasters to control population explosion. He encourages us to go to war, He creates Pakistan and Akhand Bharat. In doing this, He teaches humans new and innovative methods of birth control.

For some reason, however, He hasn't turned His attention to the problem of controlling this question explosion. Questions keep producing themselves every-where and could in fact arise any moment. The thing is very fecund. No particular weather, type of soil, water or fertilizer or plough is needed for one to produce itself.

A child is born after spending nine months in the womb, but a question pops out instantly, needing no midwife, no maternity home and no chloroform. It simply presents itself before us: Hello!

A magistrate is smoking in the court. No question arises. The accused, yours truly, is summoned but doesn't bow to his Lordship. Immediately, the question of contempt of court is produced.

Another example: you find no work and find it difficult to make ends meet. For two years you have struggled and finally give in and decide to kill yourself. You're fortunate to have failed in this effort. But now a legal question has been produced: why should you not be punished for making the attempt at suicide?

And another: the government has built a ring road and on its entire stretch didn't think it necessary to erect a urinal. One day you're just dying to go. You relieve yourself against a wall when a cop

gets you. The question of committing an indecent act in public has now been produced.

Yet another: you're a local refugee (from west Punjab). You're running a press in Rawalpindi, and another in Peshawar. You're living in Lahore, where a third, Hindu-owned press is allotted to you. No question is produced.

But say you're a refugee from the Indian side of Punjab. You've left behind a large press in India. You move to Lahore but can find no press there to be given to you. You're angry and ask why a third press was given to the local man. The question is produced: isn't he more deserving than you because he's accustomed to running presses?

One more: thieves strike six times in your house in one month. You've not gone to the police — why bother them with trifles? But they find out anyway. The question now produces itself: why did you refrain from doing an important duty?

Uncomfortable questions have been produced and more will surely be born. In the last century, the question kept arising whether the Mughal state would be overthrown. And so, on every page of its history you'll find men, great historical figures, with their necks through this noose of a single question: will the Mughal state survive?

In Amritsar's Jallianwala Bagh, people of all faiths came together for freedom. The question again was produced of overthrowing the State, and thousands of people answered that question with their lives.

Questions are usually dangerous — those that arise in the minds of rulers and in the minds of the ruled.

For the ruler usually only a single question arises (though it can appear in different versions): what can be done to control the ruled? And the question arises whether by doing this, whatever is done, the sentiment of the ruled towards the ruler will be suppressed.

Experience tells us that laws and Acts and such things have always been unsuccessful during suppression. But why? See, another question has popped out.

Of course, it's not necessary that every question should have an answer. The real question is: what is the proper thing to do? If it is to remain silent, then undoubtedly politicians would not speak. Here the question is whether this silence might provoke seditious talk among some people. But then again, why not just get rid of all such men? And another question comes up. By doing this, which in English is called a "purge", is it guaranteed that the others will be silenced? Or will the purge produce a reaction in them?

The French philosopher, J J Rousseau was troubled by this question: when man is born free, why is he in chains everywhere? But what became of this line of thought? In cutting off their chains, didn't the French cut down a few human beings as well. The question is: was

such a revolution moral?

And what happened in Russia? The slaves of centuries rose with the question of freedom. And then? They then enslaved the Tsar and his family and finally executed them. The question arises: what right do the ruled have, over some small question, to sacrifice their ruler?

But what is to be done? Whether questions are small or big, thin or fat, the damn things just keep producing themselves. Elders tell us that the questions that are produced in the mind can be answered by the intellect, but not those produced by the body. For example, the question of hunger has come up in a man's stomach. If you reply to his question with sympathy, dreams of a better future and thoughts of paradise where grapes automatically squeeze their nectar into his mouth, you'll get nowhere with him. Because the stomach demands an immediate reply to its question about food.

The question here is — when all of us know this, why do we approach the question of hunger and poverty in other ways? It's a serious question.

And then there are silly questions, which don't really deserve an answer but have your attention in any case. I was at a saloon the other day getting a shave. While the barber was lathering me up, he came up with this: 'So do you think Gandhiji shaved himself or got someone to do it for him?'

Whether a man is a barber or cobbler, butcher or baker, millionaire or pauper, these questions will keep producing themselves and there's no known way of applying birth control to them.

Yesterday, I wondered: when Adam came into being, what did he feel? And forget us adults, even children come up with some beauties every so often. We're all familiar with, 'Mother, where did I come from?'

What about, 'Father, do male pigeons massage female pigeons?'

Two little kids peeped into a locked room through the window and the question popped out: 'Why do they tell us it's bad to go about with naked feet when…'

Even the most illiterate minds produce a question. I was at a kabab stall on McLeod Road the other day. A man said: 'I've heard that Caliph Umar would sweep the floor of the local mosque in his neighbourhood. Do you think Jinnah also does this?'

And a beggar was heard saying: 'I want to ask Jinnah if his Islamic state means that I wear these rags while he dons spanking new jackets.'

It's obvious that these questions are akin to blasphemy. But what can be done? Questions produce themselves automatically whether *halal* or *haram*. Sometimes the same question is produced in the minds of thousands at the same time. These days most people are thinking

whether the business of Pakistan's government is governance or mischief. Others among us phrase the question in a slightly different way: 'Nawab Mamdot. Nawab Daultana. But wasn't this supposed to be an egalitarian state?'

In Pakistan today the following questions have produced themselves:

Should women cover themselves?

If yes, what about nurses?

Should women wear their hair in one pigtail or two?

Is it fine for women to walk confidently?

Should women mount a horse wearing a shalwar or a sari?

While on the subject of women, another question produces itself. A bearded woman goes to the maulvis and asks: 'So what is the proper thing for me to do? Am I to keep this beard? If so, how long? And should I shave off the hair on my upper lip?'

One question that's produced in the minds of our leaders concerns the 50,000 girls who were left behind during Partition and are being used by the enemy. The leaders have been troubled by this for nine months. It's possible that along with the question of those 50,000 girls, another 50,000 little questions will be produced (in fact a few thousands may have already been produced.)

— (Originally published as *Sawaal Paida Hota Hai)*

News of a Killing

Manto predicted a Partition blowback. He thought the violent forces that had been unleashed during that period would remain in Pakistan's society, damaging it. In this piece he tells us how the country would become increasingly violent unless the matter was taken up. It wasn't, of course, and again Manto shows he was correct. He said the "age of barbarism" in Pakistan had already begun — and wrote this sixty years ago. As a writer, his understanding of the solution was unusual, and he turns not to sociology but, unusually for him, to something more personal.

The most prominent headlines these days are about murder and killings. So far as the stories go, they are fine and must be reported. But one wonders why there's so much killing in Pakistan.

Aggression is part of man's character, I accept that. What I'm asking is why is it now, these days, that there is so much of it.

Every morning's paper is filled with details of cruel acts. What's behind all this? Should we lose faith in humanity? Why have we suddenly become so bloodthirsty?

It's difficult to figure out the answers to these questions. We thought of what had happened during Partition that brought the human race to shame — the parading of naked and helpless women, the murdering of lakhs of human beings, the raping of thousands of girls. We thought that after this, the problem was behind us. That Partition would rid us of the hatred and the violence. But now we learn that the hatred has not been expended. It thrives.

What had happened during the communal riots was explained away as group action. But now it's clear that the violence is still within us. Every single day brings news of this.

We must ask ourselves why have these people become so violent. Why are they so intent on actions that do such damage to others.

I think the intensity of violence during Partition could have been reduced. Unfortunately nobody attempted to do this. The result is before us. We have hardened killers living in our midst. Their actions are being reported to us in the papers.

Their hands became familiar with dagger and pistol during the communal riots. What's being done to control them now? The fact is that these people are a product of that event.

They weren't used to killing, it is the circumstance that transformed them. They loved their mothers surely, and their friends. They understood the value of honour and respect for their wives and daughters. They feared god.

That one event obliterated all of this. An event so bloody as never witnessed before. What happened then is done and there's little gain

in analyzing it. But it's absolutely essential that we examine its fallout. The changes that have come because of it. This is not the work of judges, therefore, but of psychologists. They alone can investigate the phenomenon and come out with some solution for it.

It's troubling that our government is doing nothing about it though every single day, as I keep saying, brings news of violence.

One party confronts another, guns are pulled out, daggers are drawn and plunged in, soda bottles and rocks and whatever comes to hand is flung at the other side. It's not clear where the administration disappears while this is happening. I don't want to comment on the police. They are needed to stop this, of course, but the primary work is that of psychological examination. Why is this happening at all?

If we don't examine it psychologically, I fear the situation will become worse. An era of barbarism will begin in Pakistan. Will begin? Let me correct that — it's begun.

What day passes without evidence of it? And it has been happening in the open. Another problem in preventing it is that the killers are people whom the witnesses fear. They worry for their own lives. It's often happened that a man is killed in public. The police may even catch the killer and produce him in court. But then the witnesses are not supportive and the man gets away.

I'm no supporter of the death penalty. Indeed, I'm not even in favour of jail. I don't think jail reforms people. I'm in favour of that which turns them normal again. We often talk of saints and elders who with one word made terrible people repent. The most ordinary faqir in one meeting making the devil himself take the path of angels. So the soul is undoubtedly something that exists and can be influenced.

In this, our world of science when we understand atomic structure, it's surely possible to examine ourselves, our soul, scientifically. Of course, we can't dismiss those who approach the soul through namaaz and roza and aarti and kirtan. The soul is whole. And I'm convinced that the way to reform killers among us is through educating their souls.

They should realize that they can yet be saved. That they are ordinary men and it is the circumstances that made them monsters. They should also realize that it is man whom god made venerable and excellent. Whom He made the last Prophet.

If they understood that about themselves, I'm quite certain they will reform. One incident has brought this lack of harmony. True. But we must now be rid of its fallout.

Where is our humanity? Where are its keepers?

— (Originally published as *Qatal-o-Khoon Ki Surkhiyan*)

God is Gracious in Pakistan

If ever there was a prophetic piece on Pakistan it is this. Manto sketches an apocalyptic, Mad Max type future for Pakistan in this essay, as he began to recognize its Orwellian trajectory. Who can say he had it wrong? As they blow themselves up in acts of piety, taking offense to blasphemy, infidelity, apostasy and heresy, Pakistan is acting out its laws on its streets. It has moved along the cultural path that Manto saw it taking. There is no chance that something like this can be published in Pakistan again.

God is gracious, ladies and gentlemen.

There was once that time of barbarism when we had police stations in every neighbourhood. We had the high courts. There were government offices and chowkis. There were jails filled with prisoners.

There were clubs where people gambled, and where they could get a drink or two. There were dance bars and discotheques. There were cinema halls and art galleries.

There was all of that nonsense.

But now, praise god! We can find neither poet nor musician. Allah help us, their music was the most debased thing. Are humans meant to sing? Sitting with their tanpuras and wailing away. And singing what?

Malkauns and Darbari Kannada and Miyan ki Todi and god alone knows what.

Someone should have asked: 'Look, what benefit has ever come to mankind from your raags? Do something that people will remember you by, that you'll be blessed for. That will make you feel less fearful of the grave.'

But god is all grace, ladies and gentlemen. These vulgarities are all gone now. Abolished. And, if god is gracious enough, this vulgar existence of being will also be taken away from us slowly.

I mentioned poets — what strange people they were. Neither mindful of Allah nor fearful of His Prophet. Forever referring to their lovers, some Rehana, some Salma.

And, Allah forbid! All this stuff about praising hair and cheeks. All this dreaming of "union". How filthy their minds were! *Hai aurat* (Oh woman)! they went all the time.

But now, by the grace of god, we've got fewer women among us, or at least it seems that way, because the ones we have are secure inside their homes. And the poets are gone.

Ever since Pakistan has been cleansed of poets, the very air around us has become pure and unpolluted.

I forgot to say — in the last days of poets we had those who wrote, instead of love and their women, of labour and labourers.

Instead of hair and skin, they praised sickles and hammers. Thank god, we're now rid of them and their labourers. Bastards wanted revolution, you know? To overthrow governments, to get rid of the State. To take over the economy and religion.

God's grace ensured that we were delivered from these barbarians misleading innocent people. They kept demanding, illegally I might add, their rights as human beings. With their ridiculous flags in hand, they wanted to instal a secular government. God be praised, none of them is now among us. And, a thousand praises to Allah, now Pakistan is an Islamic State ruled by mullahs. Every Thursday night we treat them to halwa. You will be disturbed to know that in those days the very existence of halwa was under threat. The poor mullahs — may god give them a thousand lives in heaven! — used to pine for it. And every hair of their lustrous beards demanded the banishing of razors. God be praised! Their prayers were answered. Now, try as you might, you cannot find a razor anywhere.

But halwa, the religious nourishment of our mullah representatives, can be found anywhere you want.

God be praised, nobody sings thumri or dadra any longer. Film songs are gone too. The funeral of music has been led out, and it has been buried with such thoroughness that no messiah can resurrect it.

What a curse this music was. People said it was "art". What rubbish. Is it an art that you listen to a song, hum it, and for a few moments forget the torture of existence? Is it art that a song makes you come alive? That sends you into the world of beauty and love?

No, Allah be praised, art can never mislead in this fashion. "*Ghoonghat ke pat khol", "Payal baji jhan-jhan-jhan-jhan", "Babul mora naihar chuto hee jaye",* "*Ratiyan kahan gawayen re".* Is there any decency in these lyrics? Allah be praised, all of this is gone now. There is only qawwali. Listen to it, chant its words and be blessed.

Painting is no less sinful, mind you. All these pictures were once made, some naked, some half-so. The artist put all his effort into the depiction of beauty. But this is *kufr* — outside of religion.

Creation is the preserve of Allah, the only one allowed to be called Creator, and not the business of His servant, man. Painting is sin.

All praise to god, then, that no artist exists among us now. Those who remain have had their fingers cut off, so that they stay clear of mischief. And now you cannot find even a straight line drawn anywhere in this, our nation.

Nobody remains to put down the glory of the setting sun on paper or canvas. Truly, that desire of studying beauty itself is extinct now, leave alone the actual creation of it.

Pictures of naked women were painted and statues of them

sculpted in those days. What can I say? They were set up with love on the pedestals of museums. Their painters and sculptors were rewarded and acclaimed. Yes, can you believe that? Rewarded. Given money, retained, shown kindness and affection and praised: 'Mr Artist, sir! How well have you reproduced the female form…These breasts….'

Lord have mercy, what did I just say. Please excuse me while I wash my mouth.

I gargled, but the bad taste hasn't left my mouth. Please forgive me for using that obscenity*.

But of course you don't know what that word means because every filthy and obscene word has been removed from the dictionaries.

Now what was I saying? Oh yes, Allah be praised that there are no museums and art galleries left. No places where naked pictures — or for that matter any pictures of "art" — may be seen.

All the museums have been torn to rubble and the rubble thrown into the sea for good measure. And this rubbish wasn't limited to painting and sculpture, oh no. It had spread to poetry and fiction. Ghazals and short stories that depicted physical interaction between man and woman were in great demand.

What a sick mindset those people had! They never thought of the spirit. Speaking always of the earth; what about the seven heavens above us? They had no idea of that. They only thought of the hunger of the body. They were clueless about the higher pangs of the soul.

God be praised! Hunger of the body has been eradicated. And if god is merciful, we'll be rid of our filthy bodies entirely and only remain as wandering, pure spirits. What a beautiful and sinless world that would be!

Then there were all those magazines writing on literature. They carried much material to mislead people and make them question virtue. What this "literature" nonsense is, I never quite understood. Was it anything worth teaching and spreading? Those stories, poems, essays, and critiques published in the name of literature — held no lessons for the young on how to respect and submit to their elders. Nor did they teach people how to fix those westernized liberals among us. That of course is an art that only comes with practice. But there weren't even any instructions on growing beards and trimming moustaches in those rags.

Literature was reduced to this alone — the interaction of man with woman. Allah help us, the psyche of those writers — trying to peek into the true nature of our bodies. Stories of romance, set in beautiful places. An evening in Awadh, a morning in Varanasi. All of this sketched out in words on paper. Flowers, bulbuls, koels, sparrows — words praising them blackened a thousand pages then.

But ladies and gentlemen, praise is owed only to Allah, who made the world. And thanks to Him now, neither bulbul remains nor flower. We killed the flower and the bulbul disappeared by itself. And many other things besides we have been rid of in this land of Pak, the pure.

I was telling you about "literature". I forgot to say that an entirely new form of it had been created. People called it "realism". Putting down what you see in front of you.

Think about it. If at this moment, you were to sneeze, what cause have I to write about this unfortunate, and frankly, ill-omened moment and present it to others as literature?

The sneeze was on its way, it came. What's the point of examining this event? Is there any beauty or virtue in describing the real world? All things come from god and go to Him.

Thank the Lord, there is no more "literature" and no more writers in Pakistan. No more essays are published, praise Allah. In fact, even newspapers are not to be found. When the government needs to tell us something, they print a few pages. God alone knows best. The government prints that paper, perhaps once a year or so, when it's needed. What's there to report in any case? Nothing news worthy ever happens in Pakistan. Nothing for people to discuss. All that happened in another time, ladies and gentlemen, and people were idle then. Sitting around in coffee shops and their homes, handling those enormous broadsheets and discussing them for hours. Which party's policies are right? Which leader to vote for? Why aren't the city's streets cleaned properly? Why aren't more art schools being opened? Shouldn't women have more rights? And god alone knows what other rubbish.

But, all praise to Him, now our nation is free of such bothersome questions. People eat, they remember god and they sleep.

And people! I forgot entirely to talk about science. This was the mother of literature. God save us from this "science". They wanted to reproduce heaven on earth, these scientists. Bastards. They made claims rivalling god's. They thought of lighting up the world so that there would be no darkness. Of making it rain when it was needed. Of finding a cure for cancer. Such insolence! They were trying to put men on the surface of the moon and make babies in test tubes!

No fear of Allah at all.

Now of course we have been rid of all this devilry. Now there's peace everywhere. No disturbances, no incidents, no poets, no painters.

Time passes like it doesn't pass at all. All of it is now saved. From birth to death, a steady flow of pure beings through this nation. The people are in a trance. And, tell me truthfully, don't you want to be in such a state too?

And… Hey… Where did this newspaper come from? Oh, we were asleep. The government must have sent it. It's come after a really long time. Let's have a look. The old days were bad, people, but there was one thing about them. They say the writing and printing of newspapers was very beautiful in those days. But what's the big deal about beauty, eh?

What's this…? Wait a minute. My eyes aren't deceiving me. Yes, it's quite clear here. A man has been… arrested. Arrested!?

He was wandering about everywhere shouting that he did not want to live in a country where there was god, but no devil.

Allah save us.

They say that when he was brought before the authorities, he began screaming: 'Bring the devil here at once or I'll go mad!' In his defense he had Allama Iqbal's poetry to back him, which also said that both devil and god were needed.

But this couplet is nowhere to be found in the official book of Iqbal's poems. And the government of Pakistan has been publishing his works regularly under its own supervision.

It's absolutely clear, then. This fellow, he's playing a game. Let's see what else the report says about this. The charge against him is grave and the government is figuring out how to put this fellow on trial.

But there are no courts. There is no jail. The State is thinking of setting up a court, a lock-up and a jail for him.

Alllah be praised, Pakistan will figure out a way to keep such people out of mischief.

— (Originally published as *Allah Ka Bada Fazal Hai* in *Oopar, Neechay aur Darmiyan*, 1954)

* Manto had earlier been prosecuted in Lahore for obscenity, and one of the words alleged to have been obscene was, "breasts"

My Fifth Trial (Part I)

Courts in British India functioned better than they do now. For us that time is distant, but Manto was troubled by the sudden exit of the British. In the newly-formed Pakistan, he faced a completely different moral code governed by an intolerant State. Although Manto was tried for obscenity several times in British India, it was only after Independence that his legal troubles sent him into despair. The essay which caused him the most trouble — about necrophilia during a riot — was called Thanda Gosht. This is the first of the two essays on the subject of his fifth trial. It was published in the Lahore-based magazine, Naqoosh, in its special issue of February-March 1953. It is interesting because Manto has something to say about Naqoosh's owner-editor in this piece, and in the next one, which was published a week later.

I've been tried four times in court for my writings. A fifth trial has now begun, and I wanted to report to you what happened and how it's coming along.

The first four short stories that attracted the law's attention were as follows:

Kali Shalwar (Black leggings)
Dhuan (Smoke)
Bu (The Odour)
Thanda Gosht (Cold Meat)

And an essay: "*Oopar, Neechay aur Darmiyan*" (Above, Below and In-between).

For *Kali Shalwar,* I had to travel from Delhi to Lahore's courts three times. *Dhuan* and *Bu* troubled me much more, for I had to travel from Bombay to Lahore. But *Thanda Gosht* trumped them all, even though this trial happened when I was already in Pakistan and didn't have to travel for it. No sensitive man, and I consider myself one, could have gone through the experience unscarred. A court is a place where every humiliation is inflicted, and where it must be suffered in silence.

I pray that nobody has to go to the place we call a court of law. I've seen no place more bizarre. And I also confess to hating the police. They've always treated me with the contempt they reserve for the worst sort of offender.

Anyway, it started the other day when a magazine in Karachi, *Payam-e-Mashriq* (Message of the East), published my essay "*Oopar, Neechay aur Darmiyan*"', without my permission. They had lifted it from the Lahore paper, *Ehsan* and soon after, the Karachi government issued a warrant in my name.

I wasn't home. Two sub-inspectors and four constables laid siege

to the house. My wife told them: 'Manto isn't home. If you want, I'll call him over.' But they were insistent that I was in fact hiding inside and that she was lying. At the time, I was at the office of Chaudhry Nazir Ahmed, who owns the *Savera* magazine.

I had just begun working on a story and had written some ten lines or so when Rashid, Chaudhry Nazir's brother, arrived. After a few moments he asked: 'What are you writing?'

'I've just begun a story,' I said, 'looks like it's going to be a long one.'

'I've come to give you some bad news,' he said, 'the police are at your place, looking for you. They think you're home and are trying to force their way in.'

My friends, Ahmed Rahi and Hameed Akhtar were with me. They were disturbed and so we all left together in a tonga. Before leaving, we told Chaudhry Rashid to telephone all the newspapers so that whatever happened could be published the next day.

When we reached, the policemen were outside the flat. My nephew, Hamid Jalal and brother-in-law, Zaheeruddin were standing next to their cars. They were telling the police, 'Look, if you must search the house, please do so. But believe us when we say that Manto isn't home.'

I also spotted Abdullah Malik chatting with some of the policemen. He was a Communist, but a "fake" one. I learnt that the sub-inspectors had threatened my wife and my sister, saying that they would enter forcibly. Then they saw me enter the compound, and calmed down.

I invited them in.

The two officers were still quite stern. When I asked what they wanted, they said they had a warrant from Karachi to search my house. I was astonished.

I'm not a spy or a smuggler or a drug-pusher. I'm a writer. Why on earth would the police need to search my property? What did they expect to find?

They demanded to know: 'Where's your library?'

I said that here in Pakistan my "library" consisted only of a few books, including three dictionaries. The rest was left behind in Bombay. 'If you're looking for something in particular, I can give you the address in Bombay,' I said. The officers ignored this and began their search of my house. It's true that there were eight or so empty bottles of beer, but these were not remarked upon. There was a little box containing papers. The policemen went through every scrap. There were some newspaper clippings. These they seized.

At this point I asked to be shown the warrant that the Karachi government had issued.

They refused to give it and instead one of the constables held it out from afar saying: 'Here it is.'

'What is this?' I asked.

'This is the thing that brought us here,' he said.

When I insisted on seeing it, he held it firmly in both hands and held it up, saying: 'Read it.' I quickly scanned it to learn that other than a search, the document was also an order for my arrest.

And immediately my thoughts turned to sureties and bail. The officers were stubborn and refused to accept any of those present as sureties. My nephew was a gazetted officer, and so was my brother-in-law. 'You're servants of the government,' they were told, 'you could be dismissed for this.'

Anyway, I was arrested and then granted bail and now I would have to go to Karachi and face another court of law. In past cases, I had submitted a doctor's note certifying that I was too unwell to attend, but that was over now.

One interesting footnote:

I looked for someone to bail me out but none of my friends could be found in their homes. In the end, I went to Mohd Tufail, a good man who bailed me out. He is the owner of *Naqoosh* of which he is also the editor. He put up all the books in his store as surety, which was for Rs 5,000.

Another interesting footnote:

Tufail saheb put up the surety but wasn't convinced that I would show up in court. It's true that I didn't have money to poison myself even if I had wanted to, leave alone make the trip. Tufail saheb came to my place, the day I had to go to Karachi, at 5 in the morning. He had with him two second class tickets. He was sending a friend of mine, Nasir Anwar, with me so that I would get to Karachi without fail. He came to drop us in a tonga and remained on the platform till the train left.

What happened to me in Karachi, I'll tell you some other time. Because at the moment I'm too unwell to write further.

— (Originally published as *Paanchvan Muqaddama (I))*

My Fifth Trial (Part II)

This is the second essay Manto wrote on his fifth trial for obscenity. It was the last time the State would harass him, and he would die soon after the trial. The piece was published after Manto was dead.

In a previous issue of *Naqoosh* (February-March 1953) I had begun to write on this subject but wasn't able to finish it because I was really unwell. I'm actually still unwell and feel I'll always remain this way. Some say this illness defines me — they mean the madness of my writing.

After I wrote that first piece, Mr Tufail, owner and editor of this magazine, published an essay of his own, titled "Mr Manto". Based on this, Ahmed Nadim Qasmi, who has unfortunately been appointed editor of *Imroze*, wrote a piece on me titled: "The Critic".

Mr Tufail's essay is in my opinion, quite personal about me. Some of the things he's written shouldn't have been made public. No man is without his weaknesses, but why put them on display? It's true that personal trivia about writers and artists is always interesting to read and reveals something about their character. But what's the point of such revelation when it brings the writer into disgrace?

On examination, it's clear that whatever he may have written, Mr Tufail's intent was not to do this. However in his emotionally-charged piece, he said things that ought not to have been said — or said in this manner.

On reading it, I wrote him this letter:

Biradaram! (My brother) — As-salaam-alekum

Last night Safiya told me you'd written a piece on me in *Naqoosh*. I couldn't read it properly, as I was very drunk. Safiya liked the piece and so read out some bits to me. I found it offensive. I let off a volley of abuse against you and then was I able to sleep.

When I read it in the morning, I found I actually liked it. I cannot deny what you've written is true. I'm happy you showed no hesitation in writing this way about me.

Whatever I am, may be found in this piece of yours — and there are some things in it that may have been in me, though I cannot feel them.

Humbly

Saadat Hasan Manto

I don't want to say anything else about the piece. What is true, I cannot escape. If I drink, I can't deny it. If I've borrowed money from someone, that also is a fact. If because of such things I am thought of as a bad man, that's fine. If I had bothered constantly about how the world saw me, I couldn't have been the author of a hundred stories.

Mr Qasmi, after reading the essay, wrote in his piece: It's true that personal trivia about writers and artists is always interesting to read and reveals something about their character. But what's the point of such revelation when it brings the writer into disgrace?

I don't know whether Mr Tufail's essay has left me in disgrace. Anyway, let's carry on with my story. As you may have known from reading my earlier piece, this is the fifth time I was being tried for obscenity.

My friend, Nasir Anwar and I reached Lahore station. Mr Tufail had already bought us tickets, what remained now was to get seats. We also had the problem of carrying many beer bottles which also needed seating and there was no space in the train for them either.

I remembered an acquaintance, Yaqub Taufiq, was assistant station master here. It turned out he was on duty. He quickly arranged for a couple of seats and we were off to Karachi.

The compartment we were in also had a maulvi in it. He was fingering his beads and it looked as if things might get uncomfortable. To resolve the problem, I said to Nasir: 'Yaar, pass me a beer.'

He reached under his seat and, opening one bottle, handed it to me. Maulvi saheb got off at the next station, still fingering his beads. This reminds me — at Lahore station, a man and his wife walked into our compartment. As they looked around for their seats, I said to the man: 'Look sir, we're drinkers. We are carrying fifteen bottles of beer. We'll get drunk and talk shit. You're clearly a good man, and apparently with your wife. It's better you go to another compartment.'

Now, as I'm writing this, Mr Tufail, who had come to ensure we boarded the train, remembered something. That man and his burqa-clad wife went to the station master and told him about the two ruffians in their compartment. The station master was surprised and said that he was talking about Saadat Hasan Manto, a thorough gentleman.

The man said: 'No, sir, that fellow referred to himself as a drunk.' Anyway, apparently they were given seats elsewhere and we were rid of them.

The journey to Karachi was disgusting, even in second class. The compartment was full of dust. It was only thanks to the beer that the ride was tolerable.

I had wondered about a hotel to stay in but, as usual, had no money. In any case, my wife had insisted: 'You must stay with my brother.' I pondered over the line: *Saari khudai ek taraf, joru ka bhai ek taraf*. So I set aside the whole world and went to the wife's brother.

He was a decent man, had a good job and an enormous flat. He welcomed us with great warmth and gave Nasir and me the flat next door to his.

Now I had no desire to stay in Karachi. After fifteen years in Bombay, this place had nothing new for me. The next morning, we went to the magistrate's court. It was an ordinary building in which sat the additional district magistrate in a smallish room.

I'd faced courts in Lahore and was familiar with their customs and culture. That is to say, I knew they were places where there was absolutely no culture.

I stood before the magistrate with hands crossed in front. He saw me and asked: 'What do you want?'

I was astonished by his politeness. I said: 'Sir, my name is Saadat Hasan Manto. You've summoned me for my essay "*Oopar, Neechay aur Darmiyan"* on the charge of obscenity under Section 292.'

He said: 'Take a seat.' I wasn't sure whom he had asked to sit and so I remained standing.

When he noticed this, he said: 'Please take a seat, Manto saheb.' I took a chair facing his desk. After a while he said to me: 'Why didn't you come all these days?'

I said I had been unwell.

'You could have sent a medical certificate surely,' he said.

I lied: 'I was too unwell to even do that.'

He heard me and was silent. Then he said: 'What is it that you'd like done here?'

What I obviously wanted was to be rid of this damn problem. I also thought of Mr Tufail, who had put up my bail and had to safeguard it by showing up early in the morning with two second class tickets.

I said to the judge: 'Let me off. I want to go back home.'

He replied: 'That can't happen immediately. I have yet to read your essay. Inshallah, I'll read it today and decide tomorrow.'

Nasir and I said goodbye to him and went off to have a few beers. We took a motorcycle-rickshaw, which I liked. Fut-fut it goes, taking minutes for a journey that might have taken hours. It wasn't even that expensive.

The next day we returned to court. The judge responded to my greeting and asked me to sit. This time I sat on the bench. He pulled out a paper and said: 'I've written the order.'

He looked at his assistant and asked: 'What's the date today?' The assistant replied: *'Pacchees.'*

I'm a little hard of hearing and thought he had fined me that sum. A twenty-five rupee fine meant I couldn't appeal, and the sentence against me would stay. 'Sir, a twenty-five rupee fine!' I said to him.

I think he had actually fined me five hundred rupees but when he heard the alarm in my words, he smiled and changed it to twenty-five.

Nasir pulled out the money from his pocket, saying: 'You've got

off lightly. This *appeal-shapeal* business would have only brought more trouble. Remember the trial for *Thanda Gosht*?'

I remembered — and trembled at the memory. I thanked god for letting me off easily in this case.

As we were leaving, the judge said: 'When are you going back?'

I replied, 'Probably today.'

'Don't go today,' he said, 'I'd like to meet you.' I became worried. Why did he need to meet me now?

'I can wait till tomorrow,' I said. He asked where we could meet at 4 pm.

I gave him the names of the bars we had been drinking at, but he wasn't a drinker and so we settled on Coffee House. We showed up fifteen minutes late. The judge was already there. We chatted. After a while, he said to me with great affection: 'Mr Manto, I think of you as one of the great writers of our time. I don't want you to think of me as unsympathetic to you.'

I was amazed. 'Then why did you fine me?'

He smiled: 'I'll tell you after a year.'

It's been some months now, and a few months remain. Let's see what the magistrate, who appears to be a man of his word, reveals.

— (Originally published as *Paanchvan Muqaddama (II)*
in *Naqoosh* magazine, March 1953)

The Background

Manto's stories about prostitutes and barbarism and necrophilia did not go down well in Pakistan. He became a target for moralists. Angered by days spent in courtrooms where he was treated poorly, and once also convicted for obscenity, he tore into his critics by contrasting their morality with his in this piece. His frustration and bitterness was evident, and that was unusual for Manto. He also took a swipe at Jinnah's Muslim League, and he was amongst its first and most devastating critics. I'm not sure if someone actually published this piece in a journal or whether it was just found in his papers, written for himself one drunk afternoon, and sent for his collected works.

'Have you heard the latest?'

— From Korea?

'No, not that.'

— About the Begum of Junagadh?

'No…'

— Some sensational murder again, is it?

'No, actually about Saadat Hasan Manto.'

— Why? Did he die?

'No, he was arrested yesterday.'

— For obscenity?

'Yes. They searched his property too.'

— Did they find any cocaine? Some contraband booze perhaps?

'No. The newspapers say nothing illegal came to hand.'

— The bastard's existence is itself illegal, I'd say.

'True.'

— Then why did they not charge him with that?

'We should leave that to the government. It knows how to fix people like him.'

— No doubt, it does.

'So what do you say? This time Manto must hang for sure.'

— I hope he does. That'll shut the bastard up once and for all.

'You're right. After what the high court said about *Thanda Gosht*, he should have hung himself.'

— And if he'd failed in the attempt…

'He would be charged with attempted suicide and locked up anyway.'

— I think that's why he didn't try it. Else he's quite an extreme fellow.

'So you think he's going to keep writing his pornography?'

— Yaar! This is the fifth case against him. If he wanted to behave, he'd have stopped after the first case and taken up something

respectable.

'True. Become a government servant perhaps, or he could have sold ghee. Or, like Ghulam Ahmad from Mohalla Pir Gilaniya, he would have come up with a miracle cure for impotence.'

— Yes. Many respectable things are open to him. But he's a godless man. Mark my words — he'll go back to writing pornography the moment he can.

'Do you know what will come to be finally?'

— I foresee something quite bad.

'There will be six cases against him in Punjab, ten in Sindh, four in the North West Frontier and three in Pakistan. He'll go insane just from the proceedings.'

— He's already gone mad twice, the newspapers reported the other day.

'That was him being farsighted. He was rehearsing so that when he actually does go nuts he can spend his time in the asylum at ease, already accustomed to it.'

— But what will he do there?

'He'll try to bring the lunatics to their senses.'

— Is that a crime?

'Not sure. Only a lawyer can say if there's a section in Pakistan's Penal Code for this. I think there should be. Bringing the insane to their senses is punishable under Section 292.'

— In its judgment on *Thanda Gosht*, the high court said the law has nothing to do with the writer's intent, or what his character is. It must only see if there is filth in his writing.

'That's precisely why I was saying that whatever the intent be in bringing the lunatics to their senses, the unnatural aspect of the whole thing should be considered.'

— These are legal things, sub-judice as they say — we should stay away from them.

'True. It's good you reminded me. I think it's a crime even to discuss them in private.'

— Tell me, if Manto really does go mad, what happens to his wife and children?

'They can go to hell! What has the law to do with that?'

— Yes, but do you think the government will step in to help them?

'The government should do something. It should tell the newspapers it is considering the matter.'

— And by the time they've "considered", the thing will be settled. Brilliant.

'Obviously. That's how it has been, always.'

— Let Manto and his family go to hell. Tell me this, how will the

high court ruling affect Urdu literature?

'Let Urdu literature also go to hell.'

— Don't say that! I'm told that literature and culture are a nation's assets.

'I only consider cold cash an asset — something physical and lying in a bank vault.'

— That's a clever way of putting it. But if this is so, then Momin, Mir, Ahsan, Zauq, Saadi, Hafiz etc — will all of them be wiped out through Section 292?

'I believe so. Else why should the law exist?'

— All the poets and writers should come to their senses and take up respectable professions.

'Join politics, perhaps?'

— Only the Muslim League, right?

'Of course. That's what I meant. To join another party is to spread obscenity.'

— Absolutely.

'There are, of course, other respectable things they could do. Put their writing talent to use by sitting outside post offices and writing letters on behalf of other people. In chaste language, naturally. Or they could scrawl advertisements, you know those random ones that walls are full of. It's a brand new nation with thousands of vacancies. They could fill some of them.'

— Yes, there's also much vacant land they could till.

'I hear the government's thinking of setting aside some of it on the Ravi River, and banishing all the hookers and whores there. Far from the city. Why not include these poets and writers and pack them off there as well?'

— Splendid idea! They'll certainly be at home there.

'What do you think will happen?'

— What else? They'll rot there. Wallowing in the filth.

'It'll be fascinating. I think Manto will be delighted with all the material around him.'

— But that fellow will write about the whores rather than sleep with them. He'll give us their stories.

'True. What he sees in the wretched of the earth, why he insists on ennobling them, I have never understood. The rest of us see them with contempt and disgust. How can he bear to embrace them?'

— His sister Ismat* says that he's fascinated by things that repel other people. It's true. Where everyone is dressed in spotless white, he wants to go covered in mud and slime and make a nuisance of himself.

'His brother Mumtaz Hussain says he sets off every morning looking for goodness in the stomach of such a person as you might never expect.'

— That's quite obscene if you ask me. To expect goodness instead of intestines.

'And what about spreading muck on those clothed in pure white?'

— Obscene too.

'Where do you think he gets so much slime from?'

— No idea. He finds it somewhere.

'Let's pray that god deliver us from his contemptible filth. This might be good for Manto also.'

(They pray)

'Lord! You're merciful and gracious. We're both sinners but we ask that Saadat Hasan Manto, son of Ghulam Hasan Manto, a good and pious man, please be taken away from this world.

'He has little use for it. He eschews the fragrances of Your world and runs towards its odours.

'He shuts his eyes when faced with light and goes in search of dark corners. He wants to see the raw and the naked. Sweet things he dislikes, he delights in the bitter.

'He finds nothing of virtue in housewives and seeks the company of sluts.

'He bathes in filth. When we cry, he giggles. When one is meant to laugh, he howls.

'He insists on wiping soot from the blackened faces of the immoral and on showing their faces to us.

'He's forsaken You, Lord, and worships the devil.

'O Master of the universe! Rid us of this man who insists on making evil normal. He loves mischief — the courts' proceedings are proof of this. Try him in Your eternal court so that justice may finally come to him.

'But be careful, Lord! He's very wily. Make sure You're not snared by one of his wiles. Of course, You know it all, but we're just reminding You.

'We only ask that You remove him from our world. And if he should remain, then remain as one of us — we who hide the world's filth and carry on like all is pure.

'Amen!'

— (Originally published as *Pasmanzar*)

* Ismat Chughtai, the renowned Indian writer

The Great Pothole Mystery

India's writers have a strange problem. Why doesn't anything work here? Why are things they notice not noticed by the others? Manto migrated to Pakistan and, out of work from Bollywood, began to wonder about such things. This is a piece he wrote to express his bewilderment with what was happening around him.

You know me as a writer of fables. The courts know me as a pornographer. The government sometimes refers to me as a Communist, and at other times as one of the nation's great literary figures.

Sometimes the doors of employment are shut to me. Other times they are opened. Sometimes I'm classified as an "unwanted person" and evicted from my house.

Then they turn around and say: 'No, it's fine. You can keep your place.'

I have wondered in the past, and still do today, what exactly it is that I am. This nation — the "biggest Islamic state on earth" as we are often reminded — what's my standing in it?

This country, which we call Pakistan and which is very dear to me, what's my place here?

I haven't found it yet. This makes me restless. This is what has sent me sometimes to the lunatic asylum, and sometimes to the hospital.

Whatever else it may be that I am, I am quite certain that I'm a human being. Proof of this resides in the fact that I have a good side to me and a bad one. I speak the truth, but sometimes I lie. I don't do namaaz, but I am familiar with the act of bowing.

If I see a wounded stray dog, I am disturbed for hours. But I'm not affected enough to take it home and nurse its wounds. When a friend is in trouble for want of money, I am inevitably troubled and saddened. But often I have desisted from offering help.

This is because I need money to buy whisky. When I meet a handicapped, legless girl I think hard about what her life must be like. I consider if it will change in case I were to marry her. But the thought flees soon after I mention it to my wife.

I am, as I said, a teller of stories. My imagination soars, true, but it plummets in the face of reality and I think to myself that if I had to ultimately fall, why was it that I even soared in the first place. But I continue to be disturbed by small things.

I can't bear to see carelessly discarded banana peels. I can't believe how stupid are people who do this. I feel saddened by those who catch rats in their own house and let them loose in another's

neighbourhood. By those who clear the rubbish from their property only to litter someone else's doorstep.

It is said that this sort of behaviour is the product of illiteracy. If this is so, and certainly it seems universally accepted as being so, why is it that education isn't made universal? Does it not show that those in charge of society and its laws are themselves illiterate?

I am shaken by the culture of our leaders. A man becomes minister and the road to his house (inevitably in a good neighbourhood) is kept spotless and smoked for mosquitoes.

But roads that actually need cleaning, the neighbour-hoods of the poor that need smoking, are ignored. Even if a mosquito were to bite the minister, what of it?

Those thousands of children who spend their childhood in rancid and fetid air are far more valuable than a minister.

These things are known to all, so what's the problem then? One can only wonder.

I often liken the relationship of the State with its citizens to that of a troubled marriage.

As a writer I find the relationship fascinating. Consider it. There is tension, and often unpleasantness, in both the union of man and woman, and of State and citizen. There is a great deal of hypocrisy too, but the relationship is not ever severed.

The intercourse between State and citizens (it will be appropriate to call it forcible intercourse) also produces offspring as a marriage does. But frightening ones, like the "Safety Act and Ordinance". Offspring that resemble their father, the State, more than the citizenry.

I don't want to say much about this, save the fact that it is beyond my understanding, as many other things are.

I can understand the aggressive capitalism-loving nationalism of America. I also understand the real meaning of Russia's hammer and sickle. But what happens here, in Pakistan, is beyond me.

It's possible that what's happening is too sophisticated for me to follow, I accept that, but it's possible also that it's too crude for me to follow. I shall always regret that there's been nobody to explain this to me.

What can a short story writer make of the pact with America that arms us? Then what can he make of our military pact with, of all nations, Turkey? He cannot even wonder what became of the inquiry into Liaquat Ali Khan's assassination. He dare not ask whether Liaquat's killer, slain immediately by the mob, received justice or whether he was also murdered unjustly.

A short story writer can, however, ask what the two potholes on the lane leading to McLeod Road from the Telegraph Office mean.

Those two potholes may have been perhaps filled over by now. But the truck that fell victim to them is certainly still there.

It isn't clear how long it will remain there wounded, asking, as I am, what the meaning of those two potholes is.

If they were dug to ensure that in the night's insufficient light, tongas fell into them, horses died or were crippled, cyclists fractured their limbs or some motorcyclist singing film songs was made to see stars, if they were dug for this reason, I have no problem with them.

Perhaps the municipal corporation should do this sort of thing to keep citizens alert. But if I were to actually say this, that I have no problem with it, the government might get me. They might say: 'Well, you don't have a problem with it, but we do.' Truth be told, taking objection and having a problem with things around us isn't done these days.

I told you that I haven't yet understood my place in Pakistan. I assume that I'm some great literary figure. I'm told I am a writer of some renown in Urdu literature (if that also were untrue, life would be even more unbearable). I have now discovered something of my real standing, and the meaning of those two potholes. They may seem unimportant, but are actually most important.

Seemingly unimportant because people may get hurt even without them. The unending and silly accidents would have continued to plague us here. Important, because they demonstrated that life could go on without the corporation.

A while ago I got a notice from the corporation saying I was an unwanted person, and ought to empty the house allotted to me. I thought this notice was itself quite unwanted.

Anyway, a few days ago I left the Tea House and hailed a tonga. When we neared the Telegraph Office, I thought we should go to Beadon Road from McLeod Road so that I could buy some flowers for my three little girls.

As the tonga turned towards McLeod Road, I suddenly spotted two monstrous holes directly in front. I'm astonished I saw them at all, for I'm quite blind in the dark. I screamed.

The alarmed coachman yanked his reins and the horse stopped. So violently did he rear that the tonga went a couple of feet back. If he had stepped forward another foot, we would have fallen in. The coachman thanked me profusely for saving his horse from injury. A few yards away we could see a collapsed tonga and its crippled horses whimpering in pain.

Now here's the first thought that came to me: Pakistan's finest short story writer has been saved. I thought of the nation at this point, not my wife or my three little girls.

I thought of myself as the nation's property, saved from damage

and destruction. The truth is of course that had I died, it would have been the end of an “unwanted person”.

A few loved ones and a couple of friends might have shed a tear or two. But this nation, which I thought I belonged to, would have no tears for me.

Many things continue to remain beyond my understanding but I particularly can’t figure out why these two potholes near the Telegraph Office did not have warning signs around them.

Boards to inform passers-by: ‘Look, if you want to kill yourself, please fall in. But in fact if you want to live, please avoid this place. If god had wanted you dead, He’d send you on your way to the promised land even on a straight and safe road.’

That they did not put up such a board is a mystery. Certainly it is beyond the understanding of a mere writer of stories. But even so he must ask — what was the nature of this mystery? If nothing else, he could have made a little story of it.

Near the Telegraph Office, where some time ago were two potholes, a wounded truck still stands, on three wheels, and a lot of bricks. I’m not sure what it’s trying to say to me, or to the corporation.

In my opinion, the government should immediately set up a commission to investigate those potholes. It can produce enough paperwork to fill up those two holes, and take long enough in doing so to ensure that other holes are dug in the meantime so that yet other commissions may be formed.

Those two potholes — zindabad!

And horses and humans that fall into them to die — murdabad!

— (Originally published as *Do Gaddhay)*

Firecrackers

Manto loved India's culture, which he did not see as belonging to any one faith. On reaching Pakistan, he was distraught to learn that the government was discouraging firecrackers and kites, seen as Hindus' way of celebration. Muslims in India had long been emulating Diwali through one of their festivals, Shab-e-Barat. In response to the puritanism that had begun creeping even in the early 1950s, Manto wrote this piece of short sketches to show the absurdity of cultural bans. Even today, kite-flying is discouraged in Lahore during the spring festival of Basant. The politicians and courts give out the logic that it is to prevent people from getting cut by kite-string. Here is Manto's absurd response to such absurd thinking.

News item:

To save Pakistan's children from the curse of fireworks, an organization was formed recently. The Anjuman Insidaad-e-Patakha jaat (Organization for the prevention of setting off fireworks). Its president will sit in the head office at Baroodkhana. It is hoped that branch offices will soon open in Russia, America and England.

Second news item:

This year twice as many children died from firecracker burns as last year. Pakistan's parents are anguished by this and have asked the government that it should legislate the maximum number of children who may be burnt to death in a given year.

The government in response has constituted a new ministry. The man running it will be called Minister Crackers. It is reported that two senior refugees from Indian Punjab are squabbling over the job.

A conversation:

A father: It isn't right to set off crackers.

Boy: Why not?

Father: It's a waste of money.

Boy: We set off so many explosions in war. Isn't that a waste of money?

Second conversation:

A boy: I'm not going to set off crackers.

Father: Why not?

Boy: I'm very responsible.

Father: What's that?! Let's go see a doctor. I'm sure there's something wrong with you.

A lesson:

Don't ever eat radish (*mooli*) in the winter. And on the night of Shab-e-Barat, don't set off crackers.

Another lesson:

Eat radish only in the summer and other than on the night of

Shab-e-Barat, set off crackers every day.

An investigation:

Experts on religious purity after much investigation have concluded that it is natural for humans to set off fireworks in celebration. Twenty thousand years ago, in the time of Prophet Az, a human head was used as a firecracker. But later, slowly, as people came to realize that each cracker burst meant one less human being, they invented other crackers.

Another investigation:

Experts on religious purity have concluded that humans invented firecrackers to scare away demons.

But when humans themselves began to turn demonic, the firecrackers were turned into bullets and bombs.

A request:

A boy: I don't want these crackers.

Father: Why not?

Boy: They make a frightening sound. Bring me one that's quiet.

Another request:

A boy: Dad, what's an atom bomb?

Father: The world's largest firecracker.

Boy: Get me one, then. I'm going to set it off on

Shab-e-Barat.

A problem:

A man takes his infant son to a faqir.

He says: 'Master, I stay near Shah Alami. God knows what's happened to my son. It seems like he's a shadow of heaven. On hearing a cracker's noise, he goes into fits.'

Another problem:

A man takes his infant son to a faqir.

He says: 'Master, I'm a refugee from Amritsar. Give me a charm for this boy of mine. Whenever he gets a chance, he gathers things and sets fire to them.'

A phuljarhi (sparkler):

A boy: In Anarkali (Lahore's red light area), a girl was passing through. Seeing her, a man said to his friend: 'What a firecracker!' (*Kya patakha hai!*)

Second boy: 'Did it go off?'

First boy: 'Yes, she took off her sandal and, *patakh se,* smashed it on his head.'

Second phuljarhi:

A boy: 'Why are we stopped from setting off crackers?'

Second boy: 'These people are orthodox types. No use saying anything to them.'

First boy: ‘What idiots! On the radio, in the newspapers, in speeches, they spew this nonsense. “Children should be kept away from the curse of firecrackers.” And yet the cracker shops are full. Instead, why don’t they just stop making crackers?’

Second boy: ‘Sssssshhh. Hope nobody’s heard that.’

— (Originally published as *Patakhay)*

Why I Can't Stand Bollywood

This piece was written by Manto as a comic feature. Its quality resides not in why he doesn't watch movies — in fact the reason is banal — but in his writing. He has a Wodehousian sense of humour, playful and inclusive. I'm not sure who he wrote this sketch for, but it is likely to have been for a magazine (because it's fairly long) for which he might have been paid per word. This explains its trajectory as you will find out.

I have long desired that someone should ask me why is it that I don't watch films.

My family sometimes enquires: 'Why don't you eat *bhindi*?'

Friends frequently demand to know: 'Why don't you wear trousers?'

At home, and also away, people are curious enough to ask: 'Why don't you get your hair cut?'

Unfortunately however, as I said, I have long been waiting to be asked this question: 'Why don't you watch films?'

But nobody asks. Despite the fact that those who know me are also aware that I was once crazy about the movies. I often watched three in a day, and the ones I loved I watched over and over again.

From Amritsar, I'd go to Lahore — even Jalandhar — to watch. I remember that for one movie, starring a favourite heroine of mine, I had to go as far as Delhi.

So what happened that I should have given up watching them entirely?

I finally have the opportunity, this essay, to relieve myself of this burden. Else I have long suffered the invitations of my friends to see a movie with them, without their asking why, when I turned them down saying: 'I don't watch films.'

I wanted them to ask why, but they never did. Some of them would just shut the car's door they had opened in invitation and move on.

Others smiled and instead of asking 'Why not?' would say, 'You're a strange man.'

Still others, behaving like Banias, would say: 'Excellent! It saved me money.'

There was a time when from Eddie Polo to John Gilbert and from Mary Pickford to Gloria Swanson, I knew all the names, every address and even each one's age. In fact I still remember how tall Gish was, and his sister, Dorothy Gish.

But today if someone were to bring up Paul Robinson, I think of Robinson Crusoe. If Ginger Rogers were praised, my thoughts would turn to Bombay's Rogers Company and its delicious Ginger soda.

When my friends discuss Shanta Hublikar and Shanta Mazumdar, I shout out: 'Shanti… shanti….' Angel-faced Nasim Banu, gorgeous Veena, sensational Ragini. These women and their bodies no longer interest me.

You perhaps think I've given up on the world and its delights. That I am ready to smear ash on my forehead and head for a mountain top as a saint. But no! I live in the same world of sensory delights as you. At least for now, in any case (who can say what tomorrow will bring?)

I eat and, yes, I drink. I read good stories and praise the writing. I am moved by couplets of poetry. And yet, sirs, I don't watch films.

At one point, the pride of my walls were photographs of actors and actresses. I was so besotted that I lovingly made the frames that held these photographs with my own hands.

In my mind I had a chamber I entered every evening. Here I would worship the stars I so loved. What has now happened that I should have locked it up? Could it be that I have become a Mahmud Ghazni-like fundamentalist?

No, sir.

Some people don't watch films because they can't see well. Others don't see the films they buy tickets for because they fall asleep the instant the lights go down. Still others because they are embarrassed (or traumatized) by scenes of lovemaking. And of course there are a few among us who think this whole business of movies is the devil's work and keep their distance.

My problem is different.

I cannot see well, it is true, but to remedy that my glasses are forever perched on my nose. My heart, praise the lord, is quite stout (and I have a cardiogram to prove it). I think of movies as the work of man, not the devil. So what's my reason, then?

That I don't watch films must particularly shock those who know me as a writer of films. What sort of man, they must wonder, writes them but doesn't watch them? 'Did he not also,' they will think, 'act in a movie? Yes, he did. Bugger has spent a decade in the industry but he says… "I don't watch movies." Must be pretending to be an eccentric.'

That isn't true either. Let me tell you what the deal is.

It's all make-believe. That is what has put me off the thing entirely. The story began twelve years ago, when I was looking for work in the movies.

I made many assaults on the Somnath of Bombay's film industry. The last of these is important because, finally, I succeeded. Meaning that I was actually able to enter a studio.

I eluded a fierce Pathan guarding the gate and managed to slip in. No sooner than I did, I heard someone shout: 'Adam bo! Adam bo!' I

froze.

A dark woman walked past. I wished she would fall for me. That we would be like the mythical Alif-Laila and this Laila would cast a spell on me. The spell would turn me into a fly, thereby sparing me the catastrophe of being discovered and thrown out.

Alas, she walked on, her ass swaying. Just then, a horde of men in armour carrying swords ran out of a corner and went into a large stable-like place. One of them, unnoticed, dropped his weapon near me. I bent to lift it, trembling, and my hand lifted it clean over my shoulder. The thing was made of plywood.

I was examining its "blade" with my thumb when a big-mustachioed man dressed as god emerged. He was walking towards the gate I had come in from, when a loud voice stopped him.

'Where do you think you're taking the company's property?' the voice demanded to know.

"God", now afraid, whimpered: 'What do you mean, boss?'

The boss, to me the very vision of Lord Indra, said with some arrogance: '*Moonch kis ka hai*?'(Whose moustache is this?)

"God" twirled the said piece of facial hair and said, with not a little pride: 'Boss, this is real.'

Boss was convinced, and so ordered: '*Tum ja ne ko sakta,*' (You may go now). And so "God" went.

Boss now turned to me, and said: 'You! You're hired.'

I learnt the next day, on turning up for my first day of work that my name wasn't Saadat Hasan Manto, but for some reason, not apparent to me, "Munshi".

My tasks, and this was made clear, were three. First, getting a paan for the director every five minutes (or so it seemed). Second, to not speak. Third, if these two were performed competently, to write, every so often, a dialogue in incorrect Urdu. And then to not speak.

Those days I was not particularly in love with the Urdu language. And so, every day when I got together with the director to maul it, it was fine.

One day, however, that changed.

Boss came in to shake the director's hand and say: 'I sold the rights to our thirteenth film.'

What's it called, the director asked.

Boss smiled: 'It's brilliant. *Pharaj-e-Ada*.'

Director turned to me: 'Munshi saheb, begin from this moment to write *Faraj-e-Ada*. But first, please get me a paan, a *desi kalakandi*…'

I interrupted: *Desi kalakandi,* roasted supari, a little *chuna* on the side and a Passing Soap cigarette. These I will bring immediately. But this *"Farz-e-Ada"* is absolutely wrong.'

Boss went red. 'What did you say…?'

'I said what you said, *chalne ko nahin sakta (*won't work).'

Director said: 'Why *chalne ko nahin sakta*?'

I said: 'It's all wrong. *Adaigi Farz* (Obeying command) it could be. Or call it *Farz Adaigi* (Command-obeying). At the most you may call it *Ada-e-Farz* (The grace of the command) and perhaps in time, as the movie unfolds, its meaning might emerge. But for the sake of god change the name from *Farz-e-Ada* (Command of the grace)!'

Boss stared at me. Then he said: 'Have you fried your brain, Munshi? *Title change hone ko nahin sakta* (The title cannot be changed*)*. I've already sold the movie.'

Hearing this fried my brain. And I lost my job.

The story of my losing the next job is similar. The name of the movie this time was: "*Ulloo ke Do Patthay"*.

I objected. 'What is this *Ulloo ke Do Patthay*? It should be *Do Ulloo ke Patthay*.'

I got the answer: 'Who are you, again? It's our money at stake here. If we want we'll call it *Patthay ke Do Ulloo*.'

And so, dear reader, work on *Ulloo ke Do Patthay* began, and I was again looking for work.

Thus I began to fall out of love with films. My total contempt for them, however, was still a few years ahead.

After working for small units, I found work with one of the larger studios. I spent four years writing films and during this time my love ended. In short, here's how.

An actress famed for her horsemanship was shooting one day. I noticed a wooden horse was brought to the sets. Not the whole horse, mind you, only its back. On this was a saddle. Three men lifted the actress and mounted her onto the horse.

The lights came on.

'Go!' the director said.

A man began to rock the horse. The camera rolled.

The next day the shot shifted to outdoors. An expert rider in the actress's clothes tore about on a real horse — a stallion so fierce it would rear up at the very thought of someone touching it.

The shots of the horse and rider going this way and that, were taken. When all this was spliced together, I could have sworn I saw the famous actress herself astride the stallion.

Then it was required that we shoot a close up of her hands holding the reins. Alas, the hands of this fairy-bodied (*pari paikar*) woman were as ugly as her face was beautiful. Her fingers were short and stubby. The director summoned a dozen extras. Of these girls, one had pretty hands. These were dusted up with whitening agent and the close up shots taken.

At this point I thought of Chacha Ghalib: '*Kaghazi hai pairahan har*

*paikar e tasveer ka.'**

Another time, we had to show that a storm had broken. I saw many men climb a machan positioned over the set with watering cans in their hands and showering water on the sets. An airplane's propeller was wheeled in and this created a terrific gale. Two other men stood with baskets of leaves. Fistfuls of these were hurled into the propeller's wake. When I saw all this on screen, the gooseflesh of my brain flared. How could it be possible? The hero was braving this fierce storm manfully in his little boat.

And this is how it is in all films.

The milk boiling over — that's limestone and water.

It's snowing in Kashmir — that's labourers showering bits of paper and soap suds. The hero and heroine are romancing in the fog — that's actually smoke from a fire of dry grass. And it's suffocating them. Tears are glycerine. A man sings, another moves his lips.

Wooden swords, wooden guns, wooden telephones.

Our heroine is short-haired but on screen her mane is so lustrous and long it could be for an advertisement.

A punch is thrown which touches nobody. But it sends a couple of villains flying onto the roof.

It's a blazing hot day, but the camera has a red filter and, lo, it's now cool moonlight. If a zebra is not to be found, a donkey is painted. All of this, over and over again, was, as we say in English, the straw that broke the camel's back.

I observed myself in the cinema hall actually cheering loudly with the crowds when I should have known better.

What an effective fraud is this business of films, that it should have also defrauded the one who helped make it.

And so, this is why, in case you had asked me, I don't watch movies.

— (Originally published as *Main Film Kyon Nahin Dekhta*)

* one of the most impenetrable couplets by Mirza Ghalib

Virtuous Women in Cinema

Despite his protestations in the previous essay, Manto loved Bollywood, and was always ready to jump to its defense. He wrote this piece at a time when only a certain class of women entered the film industry. Entertainment in general and films in particular were not seen as the sort of place where women from respectable families should be. The reason was that the connection between the tawaif, her kotha and the movies was strong and at a time when skilled dancers were not from the middle class. Manto wrote this during his early phase in the movie industry.

From the time that Hindustani films and working in them has come to prominence, the greater part of society has debated this question. Should women of virtue work in movies or not?

Some gentlemen, who want this profession to be cleansed of its image and association with women of the street, want women of good virtue to enter films.

There are other gentlemen for whom this association with cinema is not only off-putting, but a crime. These guardians of morality forget that though they seek to erase the stain of immorality from one set of faces, it will of course remain on another set.

Removing the women of the street from the film set will not mean that the market for the sale of women's bodies for pleasure will end.

Those who oppose the presence of fallen women in cinema, whose skill at acting and singing otherwise brings them entertainment and relief, forget that these women were once not fallen.

If a woman from a brothel should leave it and find work in cinema, then we have little right to oppose her. Prostitutes are really the products of society. Then why do we raise the demand for putting an end to them, when they form a legitimate part of our culture? If they are to be reformed, then we must also reform all other work that is associated with the body.

A clerk in an office spends his day writing and inspecting books of accounts. Similarly, the seller of alcohol spends his day making a living his way. Both for the same reason. Only their methods are different.

It's possible that our office clerk, should he have no other option, might also turn to selling alcohol. We would not hate him for this, even if we dont like those who drink. What reason could there be for such hatred to be shown only when a woman offers to sell what she has of value — her body?

The circumstance of such a woman is surely not deserving of hatred or contempt. The good women of our good families are the

way they are, so fragrant to us, because of the social conditions in which they were brought up. From the security of their home, they enter the financial safety of their husband's home. They are at all times distant from the rough ways of the world.

The woman who didn't have a father's shelter, had no education, who had to feed herself with her own devices, such a woman is like a broken pebble from a pavement.

Prostitutes are not born, they are made. Or they make themselves.

If a thing is in demand, it will always enter the market. Men demand the body of women. This is why every city has its red light area. If the demand were to end today, these areas would vanish on their own.

Our classification of women, this naming and branding them as prostitutes is in itself wrong. A man remains a man no matter how poor his conduct. A woman, even if she were to deviate for one instance, from the role given to her by men, is branded a whore.

She is viewed with lust and contempt. Society closes on her doors it leaves ajar for a man stained by the same ink. If both are equal, why are our barbs reserved for the woman?

It is being demanded that the entry of prostitutes into studios be forbidden. Does this not tell us that man is incapable of controlling himself? That he is in fact much weaker than the woman?

To those men who say that women from "good families" must come into the world of cinema, I have this question:

What is it that you mean by "good?"

A woman, who honestly puts her wares on display, and sells them without an intention to cheat, is such a woman not virtuous?

To these men, who want actresses to be women of virtue, I ask: is it fine for a man who acts to be not virtuous? I would say it is necessary for both actors and actresses not to be virtuous, but familiar with the emotions they portray. I say that a woman unfamiliar with the pain of separation from her lover cannot enact it properly. The woman unacquainted with sadness will not be able to show us melancholy.

The facts are before us, we cannot run away from them. If it is the quality of movies we make that concerns us, we must correct our vision. Flaws in character are personal to every individual. They have nothing to do with the talent of the person, which is the aspect that interests us. Our films, whether acted in by women of virtue or fallen virtue, must reflect reality.

I clarify here that I don't necessarily think of prostitution as a fine thing. I don't want prostitutes to be given entry into studios for the fact of them being prostitutes alone. What I want to say, and what I have said, is clear enough. If an actress has no memory of pain, no

idea of sorrow, she will never be a quality actress.

To be an actress, a woman must be familiar with the fine and the less fine aspects of life. Whether she is from a brothel or from an eminent family, to me an actress is an actress.

Her morality, or her immorality, doesn't really interest me.

Her talent and art are not related to the kind of human being she otherwise might be.

— (Originally published as *Sharif Aurtein*

Aur Filmi Duniya)

A Review of Saigal's Zindagi

So far as I know, this is the only film review Manto ever wrote. The film was called Zindagi, and it starred K L Saigal who sang some of his biggest hits, "So ja rajkumari" and "Main kya janu kya jadu hai." The film was directed by P C Barua and released in 1940. This means Manto wrote the review when he was twenty-eight. This was not an easy piece to translate. For one, there were many glancing references to scenes from a movie which I had not, and most readers of this translation may not have seen. I rewrote bits of it here and there to make it more readable in English.

The colourful glass bangles jangled and said: "Am I prettier than you?"

While the smoke rose from the fire-bed, troubled

It spiraled as a snake and asked: "Are you the secret that burns within me or am I?"

And the angels drifted in the bright air of the heavens

The spring cloud opened *out autumn's fist, and began to whisper to the mighty oaks*.

The sun's mad rays sent darkness fleeing in terror

Still waters asked the bubbling brook — "Why the impatience?"

Meanwhile, waiting behind her veil, the virgin flashed now this emotion, now that.

These lines are quite representative of poetry today. They squeeze the essence of human existence into a few words. They have life and a sense of mischief. They have anticipation, like the trembling of that awaiting virgin.

Many things like this can be written about the composition. Every line could be shown as having a meaning beyond the obvious.

But the truth is that this sort of thing is intellectually hedonistic. The writer thought of putting out only prettified lines. They don't really represent anything. The poem may be fun to read but it is ultimately meaningless, because it wasn't written for depth.

I should know — I wrote it and perhaps spent two minutes on it. But this sort of writing has become quite fashionable in literature.

In Europe, literature had become very heavy. This is why such light poetry was introduced, as a sort of reaction. The reader had had enough of the dense stuff, and so this filled the need.

India has always imitated and is now actually dependent on the west. And so it accepted this sort of poetry and copied it.

Today, I saw New Theatres' *Zindagi,* an example of such light literature. When I came out, I wondered what it was that I had seen.

The famous Pandit Inder says this film is about psychology. Meaning something that is outside of perception. A delicate thing

swimming in the ether perhaps.

Khwaja Abbas and Jamil Ansari say it's a very good film. And so I also say it's a very good film. However, I went to see *Zindagi,* meaning *life*. I'm sure Jamil Ansari understands quite well what the word means.

When the lights went down and the film began to unfold, I had a strange feeling. The sort one might have in a bar when, instead of a stiff whisky, one has been handed for some reason, a sweet and sour soft drink. It cannot be returned or thrown away, because that's not in our culture. And so for two-and-a-half hours, I slowly sipped from this drink. Of course, if lots of ice is added to a soft drink it isn't without its charms.

Zindagi is a good film. It had everything in it, except perhaps life. It had a counterfeit two-anna coin, which only director Barua could have used. It had songs which only Saigal could have sung. It had lines only Jamuna could have delivered. It had philosophy which Jamil Ansari explained. And it had the touch of an extinguished candle, a moment Khwaja Abbas appreciated.

On top of all this it had scenes of telepathy that Miyan Kardar loved and which produced magic at the box office. *Zindagi* is a good film because P C Barua made it and New Theatres produced it. And because it stars Saigal and Jamuna.

How shall I describe the film? Let me try. Many trains come from Peshawar to Bombay. Some of them are express, and some very slow. If you are fine with going to Peshawar from Bombay by the latter, even if it takes you ten or fifteen days, you will like *Zindagi*. Think of it as still waters in which there is movement only when a leaf should fall. It's a road on which no car is ever seen. It goes straight, on and on, till death.

The screenplay is written as if the author is walking slowly along a straight line that he has drawn himself. And in the end, with a thud, he falls over a cliff.

And so — *Zindagi*. In my view, life's problem is with, and its objection is to, death. But it seems here in this movie that life is on its knees before death. This film is the funeral of life, borne on Barua's shoulders. It should be said here that the dead are very heavy.

Many times in the film one notices that Barua has tired of his burden. He's out of breath and sitting in the shade of a tree to recuperate.

Me, I like action. I like seeing things that are fast. Things which excite me, like cars driven at full speed, trains hurtling along. I like these. I think they are the essential part of what I think of as life and living.

This is why may be, on seeing *Zindagi*, I felt no excitement. In

fact, I felt nothing. I came out of the hall feeling what I had felt on entering it.

I had gone to see life — what I saw instead was death.

Now I accept that death is the destination of life. But isn't even death full of life? Death isn't always dead. Death which slowly crushes life in its hands, which stills the bubbling of life's blood — that death cannot be lifeless.

In my opinion, death is more powerful than life. Even more full of life than life. But the death I saw in *Zindagi* was dull, lifeless.

The film's story is about an unemployed graduate and an oppressed woman, whose husband is a drunk. As it unfolds, it seems as if the writer is trying to construct a building on quicksand. Every moment it faces the danger of collapsing.

The girl is a melancholic, because she's been married off to the wrong man. He gets drunk and thrashes her. He throws her out of his house. But Ms Heroine is seen as claiming that she left him.

I haven't figured out what made her claim that. She was battered first and then flung away. He had no use for her. What sense does it make for her to say that she left him? She didn't have the courage to do this of her own will.

And after she's out and meets Ratan Lal, the vagabond, why on earth is she in hiding? And why is he so angry? And why, while we are at it, is he unemployed?

I heard him sing so exquisitely. He could have made more than a bit of money peddling this talent. Why, if *Zindagi* is meant to be a story of our times, he could have walked into New Theatres and found a job immediately. Every film company is short of singers.

So why is he never doing anything?

I was convinced, after seeing the whole film, that he wanted it this way. This may be why the canvas of the film is so limited.

Life isn't a little puddle, it's an ocean on which both great yachts and little boats sail. But in this film, Ratan Lal and Ms Heroine keep making holes in the bottom of their vessel. In so far as I got it, *Zindagi* is a whine against society for not letting Ratan Lal and the girl be together.Their love remained unconsummated. Is this bedding of a person the primary aspect of someone's *Zindagi*? Are bodily relations everything?

Ms Heroine is married. There's no divorce among Hindus so she cannot marry her unemployed lover. And he apparently can't get his act together because he can't bed her. Is this what life is about?

I know that love is a powerful thing. The question is: what sort of love did these two actually share? So far as I understood it, it was sexual as such love tends to be.

If it had been something more than sexual desire, something more

meaningful, something deeper, Ratan Lal would have moved his ass and done something about it.

And what does Ms Heroine do? She's a literate, educated girl. She knows the problem and the situation confronting her. She is confident enough to spend the night in the same room with a stranger rather than go to her father. She then roams the streets with this man. Could she not have fought for her rights, a woman such as her? She could have found a job and, truth be told, taken in her lover and supported him. She does nothing. She is afraid, we are told. Of what?

Barua has given the answer right at the end, when Ratan Lal begins to abuse society. Now I think it right that society should be abused, if not manhandled.

The question is — what and who is society? Are not these two people part of it? If society is a donkey, Ratan Lal is its tail, trying to whisk the flies off.

I'm told *Zindagi* is a film about society. No doubt it is, because the word "society" appears in it. And perhaps because it addresses the aspect that a woman who has been married off to the wrong fellow should be allowed to romance another man.

I'm in favour of this, but I want to see a war being fought for such rights. Some stuff should be broken in anger. A hammer taken to hand and smashed on the problem: right, we're rid of this now.

Ms Heroine can, when she wants to, break the law and get into bed with Ratan Lal. Because she possesses the heavy hammer of her father's wealth. What was she waiting for? Tough to say. Opportunities have to be created to resolve a problem. Why wait for the solution to drift towards your boat?

The other thing that troubles me is this: Ms Heroine chooses, when thrown out, to not go to her father, but a stranger. Then, theatrically, she bumps into her sister and is told that their father is dying. When she goes home, he praises her for her courage in "leaving" her husband. And he wills all his wealth to her out of admiration for this courage. He doesn't ask her where she was all this time, and why she had now returned home.

Another strange thing about the story. To show that Ratan Lal is possessed by Ms Heroine, Barua uses a very tacky device. He has Ratan Lal bump into a friend in the market. The friend insists that Ratan Lal come home with him: 'I'm having a party. Show your magic there.'

This magic, telepathic communication, is difficult to depict. It is shown instead with the girl receiving voices in her head and having a conversation with the hero. I thought this was unbecoming of a director like Barua. It seems as if he's in the cinema hall, whispering into the ears of his audience: 'Please remember viewers, that the

heroine is on our hero's mind. The… Heroine… Please… Understand…' It was as obvious as that.

Zindagi is a well-packaged film. I suspect Barua recently picked up a few tips from Europe. I wish, like Barua, I could turn this review into a film. Alas, I have no New Theatres to back me. And without New Theatres, a film like this cannot be made.

Afterthoughts (a few lines written after the review was finished).

I repeat: there is no life in *Zindagi*. It has death, and a lifeless sort at that. The image I have of this movie, now that I can look back at it, is that of a colourful balloon losing its air slowly. It is said this film represents a rebellion against society. A woman with her delicate hands breaks open the bonds that have been imposed on her.

I saw the film with these eyes of mine and I saw her bravery nowhere. I only saw her cowardice. Indeed, from one end of this film to the other, not one act of daring can be seen.

The film begins with a scene at Ratan Lal's house. The rent hasn't been paid. Hearing his landlord's voice, and fearing a confrontation, the terrified hero slips out of his house unnoticed.

Through the film we see that the hero and heroine keep running scared, even from those who are not enemies. Why would anyone want to chase them? And why do they hide all the time? Why are they alarmed by every sound?

Mr Abbas and Mr Jamil might be able to answer this in their way. I have my own explanation.

These two characters are not the people they should have been. Let me explain. Ms Heroine has been thrown out by her husband. She pines for love and male companionship. What does she do? Attach herself to the first available man she meets. We see the expression of her love on screen, and that's how it should be, because she is hungry for it. Hungry for physical love. She doesn't particularly care to know — for she doesn't even ask him — who or what Ratan Lal is. She just jumps straight into his lap because he's a man.

She is bold enough to sleep in a room with him, but not bold enough to own up to this. And I couldn't figure out why they kept crying all the time instead of doing something about it. Surely she was bold enough to have seen the thing through?

And why abuse society? When Ms Heroine is considering spending the night in Ratan Lal's company, society doesn't knock on the door and tear them apart. Nobody objects to their wandering about openly in the streets either.

Whatever Khwaja Abbas might say, the fact is that the two of them are aching to be in bed, but they also want that the society shouldn't have a problem with that.

This story was just about the two of them. They could have done

as they wished, and what difference would it have made to society? Would it have brought Armageddon? If not, what was the point of this film? It has no bearing on reality, no relation to society. It is merely the story of one couple's inability to have sex. That's it. Why make it out to be something else?

The film calls itself *Zindagi*, or life. Life is not about a man and a woman. Life is about action. Life is a struggle. Life is about staying alive. This loser of a hero, who has an MA and who sings like an angel, could have earned thousands of rupees a month if he had chosen to work instead of whining. He knew how to perform magic, but he's shown winning only a counterfeit, two anna coin and wandering about the streets. I regret that it was

Ms Heroine who was killed off in the end by the script. I wish Ratan Lal had gone instead, a useless man. He loves her but curses the society.

Had I been the society, I would have slapped the fool so hard he wouldn't have had the courage to stay an unemployed vagabond.

And another thing I didn't understand. When her father thinks she has done this great thing, he makes over all his wealth to Ms Heroine. She promptly begins to give it all away to charity. As an act this is fine, but what aspect of her character was driving her to do this? Was she doing it to get into heaven? It's all a mystery.

Khwaja Abbas says those who go to watch *Zindagi* should carry two handkerchiefs with them. I agree.

One to wipe your tears, the other to wipe Barua's!

— (Originally published as *Zindagi — Isi Naam*

Ke Ek Film Par Review)

What Bollywood Must Do

What would Manto have made of Bollywood? I don't think he would have been surprised by the fact that it remained in Mumbai (he would be amused by the city's renaming). He understood quickly and instinctively that this was the only place in the subcontinent that was both civilized and liberal to support an industry that could only blossom on the cusp of immorality. Manto would perhaps have been disappointed and pleased at today's Bollywood. Disappointed because the higher aspects of what he expected from the business never materialized except in what we know as art or alternative cinema. He would have been pleased because film has been the most effective medium for spreading ideas, more than print. In this essay, he sets ideals for the industry he worked in and loved, and had to let go when he later moved to Lahore.

In 1913, Mr D G Phalke made India's first film. He thus began the art of filmmaking in the subcontinent. It was his dream to bring cinema to India and the dream was realized when he sold his wife's jewels to raise money.

However, the dream that the progressive youth of India have seen has still not come to fruition. There is but one reason for this: the people in charge of moviemaking here are old-fashioned and simple-minded. They have neither the desire nor the intention to progress. No art can come out of this lot, whose lives are like still waters.

India's youth, whom I am representing, who want to explore every aspect of life, who want to soar in flight despite having their wings clipped, aren't satisfied with the state of filmmaking.

They are witless children, yes, ignorant of the ways of the world, true, and vagabonds, perhaps. But the desire in their hearts, the eagerness on their faces is worth something. It should make the fat-walleted businessmen, who control the Indian Motion Picture Congress, ashamed.

But in fact these young Indians are thought to be sick. And indeed they are. They are infected with love for their country. They want to mount the chariot of the State and see India delivered to its destiny, where other great nations already stand. They are willing to die for this.

They don't have the clinking coins of the businessmen but they flash a more valuable asset: the crimson sparkle of their blood. This is madness, but it should be respected. India needs it.

We want good films. We want great films, such as we can put up against the work from other nations. We want every aspect of India to shine. This desire burns in us and we cannot separate it from our being.

Before its revolution, Russia was in a worse state than India. There were no sign of either literature nor poetry. But in a short burst of genius, Russia produced her Wali, her Mir and her Ghalib. And so it is also with her films. Russia has produced directors of such greatness that they will remain a source of pride for all humanity.

But for the last twenty-five years, made of 9,125 days, what have we got to show? Can we put on display our directors? What about our writers, who exist by ripping off the writings of others? Can we show our movies — all of them copies of American films — to others?

No.

India should make Indian films. We don't at the moment. Take our social films, made by the dozen today. Are they really Indian in their sensibilities? No. You hardly see any "Indianess" in them; often characters dressed in western clothes to appear American and the reverse, a western actor wearing dhoti-kurta. These absurdities are called social films, just as our actors refer to themselves as "artists".

Art has not been defined in India. The Lord alone knows what it is thought to be. Art is a paint-filled tub into which everyone dips their clothes. But this isn't really art and such people aren't artists. The other word bandied about is "masterpiece". If everyone in the studio, from the director to the fellow who hammers nails into the set, is an artist, it is also a fact that every Indian movie from *Raja Harishchandra* to *Sitara* is a masterpiece. Because of this, art has lost its value and masterpieces have depreciated. Here are my observations on our movies and what is needed to improve our cinema.

Films and Producers: analysis and criticism of India's filmmaking is published regularly. But the press doesn't really help here. This is because the film press is focussed on its business, which is to make money. And the advertising in such magazines is mainly from producers. We have many papers and magazines but no real journalism. This will change when we become less barbaric as a nation, and this in turn will come only after the populace is finally exposed to the thinking of intellectuals.

There are many ways of educating a nation, but there is consensus that film is an important one. It is easy and efficient to communicate a message, even one that is complicated, through movies.

Texts weigh heavy on the individual and for most children, so does schooling. It is no different in college, of course. But the message that might take months of studying to properly understand, however, might be passed on in an instant through films.

India needs entertaining movies that also educate, exercise the mind and introduces us to new ideas and new thinking.

At the moment, our producers believe in nothing but profit. This

is fine as it is after all a business, but we must complain. First, very often third-rate films are produced and screened in the belief that they attract more viewers and bring in more profit. This notion is misplaced. Entertainment is *produced*; it doesn't produce itself. If there are many among us who like cheap entertainment, it is the doing of our producers.

There isn't great interest in stories of sorcery, mumbo-jumbo and magic as our producers think. People want to see something that concerns them. The purely physical is always transient, and how many of us still remember the stunts of Master Vithal?

What we need is films that teach, not ones that make us forget. Films that make us love our language, our nation. We want the pages of humanity to be opened before us. Can't our producers do this? Can't they make profits by doing this?

Need for brevity: looking at the length of our movies from the silent era, it appears our producers think that unnaturally long films are preferred by the audience. Perhaps there is some truth to this. But the fact is that this is the age of being to the point. When a film's story can be completely revealed in seven or eight thousand feet of film, what is the point of extending it to 15,000 feet?

What happens when this is done is obvious. Like a piece of rubber which can only be stretched so far and no further, the film's story snaps. It loses the integrity that it had in the shorter version.

However skilled a movie's director may be with the digressions that extend the movie, he cannot succeed in improving the original.

A longer film must necessarily have longer dialogues. The actors will be forced to slow the pace and the plot will appear stupid. Longer movies also take longer to make and cost more money.

Films that could be made within 60,000 or 70,000 rupees take a lakh to finish. And if they flop, they seriously damage the producer. The other thing is to make a lengthier film, producers and directors introduce unnecessary song and dance. This is supposed to prettify the film but the aim is rarely, if ever, achieved. The additional money spent in shooting is not justified by the result. Songs and scenes have a place and time. Removed from these, they lose their meaning and beauty. So it's important that our producers make their films shorter.

Cutting their 18,000-feet movies in half can produce a revolution in moviemaking. To set a two-hour programme, our producers should follow Hollywood. Before the movie, a newsreel or a reel or two of cartoons should be shown, as is also the case in Europe. Audiences are kept informed of the latest news from other nations.

Here, we have been needlessly watching lengthy films for twenty-five years. It's time to end this chapter.

Stars: for thirty years, the masters of Hollywood have puzzled

over this question — is the star more important or the film? So intensely has this been debated that the very thought of it now raises emotions. Perhaps the one valid response to this question would be to ask: 'What is that you just said?' It's as absurd as asking whether the chicken came first or the egg. If a satisfactory answer to this can be found, we will no doubt also be able to figure out whether the film is more important than the star.

Frank Capra, the famous director from Columbia Pictures, recently expressed his views in an English newspaper regarding this. He said: 'I'm with those who think that the film is most important. It is the film that makes the star and the biggest star cannot rescue a bad film.'

This is obvious but here in India, people are not in complete agreement with the statement. The best way of looking at it is to ask: 'How are stars formed and with what?'

Capra answers this most interestingly: 'If producers handed me all their money and said — "Now make us three stars", I would be at a loss. I have no idea where to get a star from.'

In the silent era, Hollywood's stars came from anywhere — hotels, factories and offices. Now, in the time of talkies, the supply ended because more skill was required. Here in India, stars came from the stage or the brothel. In the future, just as it happened in Hollywood, the supply of stars is going to end here as well.

Anyway, we were talking about what is it that results in the making of a star? Capra, who has directed the biggest stars of Hollywood, says that casting a film right is what produces a star. In his opinion, a Chinese character must only be played by a Chinese. Similarly the part of a man who is handicapped must be essayed by one who actually has that particular handicap.

I agree with Capra. We, you and I, can play ourselves better than we can someone else. Capra has given many examples of what he means, including that of Gary Cooper. He says Cooper presents himself on screen in true colours. That is to say, in real life because he is of good humour and classy, he can communicate that without much effort.

So a good and sensible casting makes stars out of actors. That of course is not the end of it because right casting merely doesn't produce a hit film. Other things are required and as a viewer, you are familiar with what these are. Good actors and technicians are of course crucial. Till everything is in place, a hit film will not be produced. Just like a very expensive watch must be put together flawlessly for it to be able to tell time accurately all the time, a film in all its minutest parts and components must be perfect.

Directors: the biggest problem of Indian cinema is the lack of

stylish directors. All storytelling requires a certain sense of style. It is this which separates the work of one writer from another. It is no different for films and their directors. In the absence of this individualism, films will resemble one another. Indian films have been screened for some years now, but there have only been a handful in which we can observe the style and individualism of a director. The rest have been put together in much the same way, and their makers have neither seen things differently nor originally.

We may surmise that the problem was that the producers hired less than competent directors who themselves didn't understand the story and its narrative. Nor have they been able to make their audience understand.

Many films are made and shown in India these days but truth be told, few of them are really "films" if judged against the craft of filmmaking. Most directors have no sense of imagination. They only know close-up, mid-shot and long-shot. This they set about to do with the story in hand, bringing the camera every so often to the heroine's face. They don't really understand the idea of a close-up and where it should be deployed.

They are like writers who indulge in meaningless word play.

If an Ernst Lubitsch film is shown without credits, we can still identify it from the comic scenes and the smallest details. In an exotic outdoor location, when we see a heroine flitting about like a butterfly, we can feel the heart of D W Griffith, a lover of nature and the outdoors, aflutter behind the camera. Similarly, Eric Von Stroheim's love for realism cannot be hidden. Many such examples can be given of directors and their individualism. Almost every Hollywood director has his own sense of style and this is the reason for his success.

In India, such a director is a rarity. Only two come to mind, Debaki Bose and V Shantaram. *Rajrani Meera, Puran Bhagat, After the Earthquake* and *Vidyapati*, in all of these you can see the dreamy vision of Bose.

Similarly, Shantaram's love for grandeur and allusion, his two favourite themes, is always on display. A film which shows them relentlessly can be identified as the product of his Prabhat Film Company. This is why he is our greatest director. Nitin Bose is not on this list because he isn't really a director so much as he is a showman.

Acting: acting is the ability to show various moods and emotions. Like poetry, painting, writing and sculpture, it is one of the fine arts. There are of course those who will disagree, like Tolstoy and his followers. They don't consider the work of stage and cinema as art. Tolstoy stands apart in thinking this way. But each to his own.

Acting is as ancient an art as storytelling. Good acting is to convincingly recount and imitate the emotion felt by another.

When a child describes how his terrified grandmother hid from a mouse in the bathroom, how she trembled in fear, he is in fact acting. If he is able to convince you and involve you in his telling of the story, he is a good actor.

Films are exactly the same but on a large scale. The difference is that there are many people — young and old — doing together what the little boy did alone.

The other thing is that nobody directed the child or the perspective. The camera's angle keeps changing and so does the lighting. The actor must remain in the frame while showing his act, unlike the boy who can move about at random. If the actor moves too much, he slips out. If he turns his face the wrong way even slightly then again the camera will punish him. He has many such difficulties.

Acting is a tough art and needs a special mindset and physical ability. In Hollywood, people are sought who fit the written role precisely. How seriously they go about doing this can be discerned by knowing that every company has scouts in many countries who keep a lookout for the right man and woman.

Much money is then spent on training these people and then, on the magical night of their first release, they become famous in an instant.

When India began making films, musicians and prostitutes were enrolled as actors. Not much has changed though many years have since passed. Any man with a decent voice and who can render a song competently is cast as a hero and six of his films are released in a year. In actresses, all that is sought is a pretty face. Because our fundamentals are wrong, there is no great skill in our actors, as it isn't expected of them. This doesn't mean however that we are lacking in great actors and actresses. Unfortunately, they will never get the opportunity to prove themselves.

The Saint: even if you are not a particularly keen observer, you must have noticed one unique thing about our films that keeps repeating itself. I'm referring to the faqir or sadhu that our directors love inserting into their plots. It happens in this fashion: the script reads that the heroine is dejected and is sitting all by herself and the director must show this dejection, the melancholy. His solution is to conjure up a singing mendicant. A singer is always around in the studio to be included where necessary and so this is easily done.

He doesn't know why he is singing. He's a singing machine that needs to be switched on. I know someone who has sung dozens of songs under every tree of the studio's sets. By the sea, on the river bank, in a car and on the road. God alone knows how many songs he has delivered on demand, sometimes as a bearded faqir and other times as a dreadlocked sadhu. He is made up as an old man and

dispatched to the sets. He rehearses and then the camera swallows him. When the projector vomits him out, we see the heroine on a sofa (long shot followed by a close-up). She is in tears, and a pained voice sings from outside:

My heart weeps and
I pine for you so much

She squeezes out a couple of more tears. Cut.

We are now in a market where our man dressed as a mendicant is belting out his anthem of grief. He goes on for seven-and-a-half minutes, during which we see the heroine sighing with the song's emotions, and then we are back to the singer. When the song ends, the girl's father, standing outside his door and magically able to make the connection between the song and his daughter's feelings, steps in to say: 'My darling, why are you so sad?'

I want to know the reason for such stupidity in the movies. When we are sad, do the city's sadhus and beggars announce it through their songs? It can happen in a couple of films and we can forgive their directors. But to be subjected to this in almost every film? Intolerable.

Five years ago, and this is true, when I wasn't really familiar with Indian films, I was fascinated by the sadhus and beggars I saw on the streets. Now when I spot one, I am reminded of my singing friend and turn my face away in disgust. I have come to realize that whenever our directors are short of an idea, they deploy the sadhu maharaj and his song and think they've killed two birds with one stone.

In terms of cinematic structure, this intrusion is also an error. The audience's attention turns away from the narrative to the aside, the singing sadhu. He vanishes after a few minutes while the story does not move. Why do we have this diversion at all?

I think some film with this sequence was a big hit and producers have attributed its success in part to the singing sadhu. The relentless use of this scene shows how short on creativity is our filmmaking. The sadhu has become a box office regular now, endlessly irritating those in the audience with a bit of taste and discernment. Please let's be done with this fellow.

Villains: early American cinema's ideas and formats dominate our industry even today, as we celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary. The plotlines and treatment are copied with such diligence that all our films are now alike. We need to change this immediately. Originally, the earliest American movies used to be centred around three characters — hero, heroine and the villain.

In India this is still the format. The producer picks a hero and then immediately a heroine and a villain.

I accept that there must be good and evil and light and shade but surely there must be some method and some logic in how they are

shown? In general, I have no objection to heroine and villain. They could be important elements of the story. But I do have a problem with villains who are labelled so, even before their characters have a chance to reveal themselves. Villains who are *villains* in every role.

Literature and film in my opinion are like saloons where bottles have no labels. I want to taste each one myself and figure out which is what. If I'm denied this by labelling, then my entertainment is considerably lessened.

The other thing I find idiotic is how all our heroes look the same. Handsome, young, brave, kind and so on. He fights from start to finish as if swords will never bruise him. And his love is always true, unlike the poor villain's lust. I find such characters totally unconvincing and am not drawn to the plot they are a part of. To me, a hero must be a character I'm able to accept. For whom I have sympathy, who is human with all the traits that humans have. I want nobody angelic because I live on earth. He can soar in the sky but he must be rooted to the ground. I have no grouse against angels, but I love my fellow human beings more, who share the world with me.

I find our goody-goody heroines trying as well. Few writers are able to present an accurate picture of a woman and the reason for this is the purdah that veils our women. Such separation of the sexes produces ignorance. I would say that eighty per cent of our female literary figures are fantastic and unreal. The are counterfeit and lack the clink of real coins. They don't have the aspects of true femininity that goes into making a woman. They are fantasy figures, who don't belong to our world, and I have the same feeling about our villains. These are lifeless figures of clay, standing in because the script needs them.

There are bad people among us, accepted, and certainly we have no shortage of criminals in society. But to me, a man who is villainous throughout the day, seems unable to see the good from bad, or white from black, cannot be convincing, turning around, in a moment at the end to protect the writer from criticism.

Should we not move beyond these stereotypes? Our heroes are blemishless because our writers think any stain on the character is a stain on them. This childishness, laziness, this sentimentalism has no place in first rate literature.

Stories are not meant to be played out on a chessboard, where each piece moves in a defined manner. The world is its domain, where an infinite number of possibilities exist.

Plots, heroes, side-heroes, heroines, side-heroines, villains, side-villains, vamp and side-vamp — without all of these, stories can still be written.

Only a little understanding is needed.

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